

Harry Potter: Kidnapped

Chapter 1

Harry Potter stared at the paper in his hand. The “100” on the top of the test was bad enough, but the smiley face beside it mocked him. He was tempted to throw it away, but the problem was that his cousin, Dudley Dursley, was in his second grade class, and so he knew Harry had taken the test too. Dudley also knew that Harry had a perfect score because the teacher had boasted that Harry was the only one to make a perfect score on the test. Harry also knew that Dudley would discuss the test, and Harry’s results, over dinner. More accurately, Harry knew Dudley would talk about it just before dinner, and so he would be sent to his cupboard without dinner once again, while “perfect little Dudley” would get his normal dinner and Harry’s too. Life was so unfair.

He sighed as he considered what would happen to him because of moment of forgetfulness to do only a little better than Dudley. Harry looked around at the other children in his class, and he was almost sure none of them had to worry about bringing home a perfect score. Harry put the paper away and picked up his reading book to look like everyone else while he thought, not that he was really reading; he did not need to as he had already read the section a couple of days ago.

What was he going to do? He remembered the missed meals and being throw into his cupboard when had scored much better than his cousin last year in first grade. His cupboard still had an odor to it because he had not been let out for an entire weekend. That incident had opened his eyes to a completely new set of injustices against him. He really wanted just to throw the paper away and claim that Dudley was lying about the perfect score, but his aunt and uncle always believed their son over him. He was just going to have to take his lumps and be more careful with his schoolwork, he thought bitterly.

Looking up, he saw his teacher grading papers. He wished he could tell her what was going on and see if she could help him, but he did not dare. Harry had tried that once with the school nurse, who had asked his aunt a few questions, and he had actually been cuffed around by his uncle when they had returned to the house. His injuries

had not been too bad, but they had stung a lot and it had hurt to breathe deeply for the next few days because he had fallen onto the edge of the living room table.

He wished he did not have to deal with his relatives ever again, they were not his family. He wished he was on his own. He idly turned a page to make it look like he was reading as he thought. What would it be like to be on his own?

A devious smile crossed his face as he thought about doing what he wanted and not getting into trouble for it. That was enjoyable for a few minutes, until reality asserted itself. To be on his own also meant he would no longer be in his aunt's house. Where would he live? He considered that. He could live outside almost anywhere for another month or so. Eventually, it would get too cold and he'd have to find a house or shelter somewhere. That might not be too bad. He could live on his own during warm weather, and in a shelter in cold weather.

Would they try to send him back to his aunt when he went to a shelter? Well, that was easily avoided. Just don't tell them his real name, and he would have to get away from Surrey so no one would recognize him.

Food could be an issue, he considered. Well, he did not eat much now, so maybe he could find some money here and there or beg for it. Surely that could not be any worse than with his relatives, could it? He turned another page, not really reading this one either.

Shelter and food seemed to be the more important things, at least that he knew about. He considered it more. Maybe he could do it. Looking to his right and a little back, he saw his cousin whisper to his best friend Piers, who quietly chuckled and then looked at Harry with an evil smile. That did it; he would take his chances out in the world. If the worst happened, he could go to one of those orphanages his uncle threatened him with. He suspected his uncle was lying and they were not as bad as he said. His uncle lied about enough other things, Harry was never totally sure what was true and what was not.

Harry thought very carefully about what he needed to do. Dudley was further away from the door, that would help, as would the fact that

Dudley was a slow runner. Harry really only needed two things from his aunt's house -- no three, no four. Harry wondered if he was forgetting anything else as his mental list grew.

He looked up at the clock on the wall and saw that the final bell for the day would ring in about two minutes. He could not go to school again, but he really did not want to stop learning. He could take his books with him, but that would be stealing. They would also slow him down with running. Another glance up showed he had about one minute.

Quickly, Harry pulled all of his books out of his little book bag and put them under his desk. The girl next to him frowned and stared, obviously wondering what he was doing. Ignoring her, he put all of "his" things into his book bag, paper and pencils being the most important. He closed his now much lighter bag and waited. His legs tensed as he readied for the first ring of the bell.

Half a minute later, the final bell started ringing and Harry shot out of his desk for the door surprising everyone, especially the teacher; but he was out before she could stop him. Not worrying about the school rule of not running in the hall, since he was not planning to return, he ran for the outside door. Hitting the bar to open the door barely slowed him down. With his light backpack bouncing on his back, Harry ran for his aunt's house, taking every short-cut he knew of.

He would easily beat his cousin back. The only real problem would be if his aunt, or especially his uncle, was there. Perhaps he could run past them, there were two doors in and out of the house.

Out of breathe, but not willing to stop, Harry ran up to the front door of #4 Privet Drive, pleased that his uncle's car was not in the driveway. The front door was locked and while that slowed him down, it also gave him hope that his aunt was probably not home. He ran around to the back and opened the door. Not seeing his aunt in the kitchen, he ran to the pantry and pulled out a grocery bag. As quickly as he could, he grabbed several bags of crisps and other packaged food that he could eat without having to cook and put them in the bag. Next, he went to the fridge and grabbed as much fruit as he could

and put it in the bag too. That would give him some food for the next few days, if he was careful.

The next things on his mental list were his, so he ran to his cupboard. Opening it up, he pulled out his blanket and what few clothes he had, as well as a light jacket that was one size too small, tossing them onto the blanket before he balled it all up and shoved the bundle of cloth into the grocery bag. Reaching into a cubby hole only he knew about, he pulled out a small paper bag. Hastily, he put the little clinking bag into his book bag. It was change that he had found in the couch when he was cleaning.

Leaving everything sitting where it was, he quickly ran up the stairs to his aunt and uncle's bedroom, thankful that the house was empty. Going to the dresser, he pulled out the bottom drawer and smiled as he saw his uncles stash of "mad money". The man had talked about having it in case something ever went wrong, and Harry decided things were going wrong, so he grabbed the three bundles of bills and stuffed them into the pockets of his baggy jeans.

He felt a little bad about doing this, as it could be considered stealing, but he justified it to himself that it was his pay for all the chores he had done since he was old enough to remember. He had heard a girl in class last year say that their family had woman come into their home to cook, clean, do laundry, and she was a paid for that. Harry had done all of those things and more.

With money for necessities and emergencies, he put the drawer back and ran downstairs. For the first time, he clomped on the stairs just like his cousin always did.

Shutting the door to the cupboard under the stairs, Harry slung his backpack on before grabbing the grocery and heading for the front door. As he started to open it, he heard shouting from the other side and someone frantically trying to open the door. Harry froze.

"Mum's not here, around to the back," Dudley shouted, although he sounded very out of breath. Harry waited a few seconds and then opened the door. Not seeing anyone, he stepped out and closed the door behind him. Still not seeing anyone, although he could hear the

shouts from the back garden, Harry ran down the street, turning after the first block. For the next half dozen blocks, Harry did not stop running. He turned down another street before he slowed to a walk, drawing in great gulps of air after his exertion.

Harry was almost happy he was “lost”. He did not think this was the route his uncle took to work and he knew of no reason that his aunt would be here, although who knew what his aunt really did when both he and his cousin were off at school. During the summer, she always stuck round the house cleaning the parts she did not make him clean, reading magazines, and watching the telly.

Even though he was only a little more than seven, he knew from listening to his uncle, that London was to the east. Thanks to a school book, he knew that the sun rose in the east and set in the west. So, Harry put the late afternoon sun at his back and started walking, his book backpack over his shoulders and the grocery bag in his arms. He got a strange look from a few people, but most ignored him.

Harry continued to walk as the sky darkened. The neighborhood he had grown up in was now at least several miles behind him and he entered a wooded area. To his mind, it seemed like a good place to hide. Being found now would not be a good thing. When his uncle reported him missing, and Harry was sure he would as Harry’s aunt would make him, he would be returned to them. After all, how many children ran away each day?

Walking in the woods not too far from the road, Harry continued to follow the direction of the road he had been walking on. Just before dark, Harry noticed that the woods were coming to an end and there was another neighborhood in front of him. He stopped and looked around carefully. He decided it was probably best to stop here for the night.

Spreading his blanket out, Harry sat down, more tired than he would have imagined. Digging into his grocery bag, Harry pulled out a bag of crisps and opened it for dinner. As he finished the bag, he found the first flaw in his plan: no water. Digging in the bag again, Harry pulled out an apple and ate it. That was almost juicy enough to help, but he really wanted more water. It was not much of a dinner, but it

was more than he got some nights. He looked towards the house a couple of hundred yards away and wondered. If it was like his relatives house, there would be a garden hose on the outside. Harry figured they probably would not mind, but it was also probably better that they did not know he wanted some of their water. He wished he had a bottle of some sort.

Putting on his light jacket and laying his head down, Harry looked up as the sky darkened. The stars were coming out and there was a half moon. The temperature was only cool this early in September, but he wrapped himself up in his blanket anyway. The ground was a bit hard, but only a little more so than his old crib mattress under the stairs. Before he knew it, Harry was asleep, feeling the best he had felt in a long time.

A faint light woke Harry up. Looking around, he realized the new day was about to begin. Fortunately, most people were not up and about yet. As quickly as he could, he got up and ran for the nearby house. Luckily, they did have a tap and hose in the front behind some bushes, so Harry turned the water on so it just barely dribbled out and made no noise. He greedily drank for the next few minutes before he turned the water off. Once more he wished really hard that he had a bottle, like one of those plastic bottles his aunt brought fizzy drinks home for his cousin.

Harry felt a strange tingle, and while he tried to figure out what it was, a clear plastic bottle with a faded label hit him in the head as if it had been thrown to him, causing him to almost yell. With great fear, Harry slowly looked around, but did not see or hear anyone. He could not explain what had happened, but he decided to take the bottle and use it. While he wished he could wash the bottle first, he figured rinsing it would be the best he could do, so he did that and then filled it up. With water he could now take with him, he quietly ran back to the woods and his stuff.

With one exception, Harry was ready to continue his journey. Drinking the water had made him need to go to the bathroom, but there was no bathroom available. That was another problem he would have to solve. Fortunately, at the moment, a bush would be good enough, so he stood behind one and relieved himself.

Feeling much better, now Harry picked up his stuff and started walking again. He got a few more strange looks as the morning went on, but again, Harry ignored them as he walked towards the sun. By the time the sun was overhead, Harry had come to a major road and saw a sign that pointed to London. He smiled as he thought it would be the perfect place to get lost in. There, he could just be one of thousands, maybe even millions.

Scouting out the area, he saw a little store that sold petrol for cars and looked like it also had food inside. Doing his best to look normal, while sweating in fear of getting caught, Harry walked inside. The clerk looked at him, but did not say anything. In the back, Harry found a row of sandwiches. Noting their price, he pulled some of the money out of his pocket. The entire bundle was made up of bills that had a twenty on them, so Harry pulled one out and pushed the bundle back down. Grabbing a sandwich and a liter bottle of water, Harry walked up and paid for his items. The clerk looked at him even more strangely, but sold the items to him and gave him change back. Harry took his sandwich outside and found a small park nearby. Walking over, he ate his lunch and pondered a question.

Why was he receiving so many strange looks? Glancing around, he saw mothers with their little children, and some of them were looking at him strangely too. Did they fear him? He drank his water as he watch two of the mothers talking, one of them looking over at him for a moment. He did not understand, because he never had this problem when he went to the park after school.

Then it hit him. He should be in school because of his age. While he was small for his age, evidenced by the fact that he was the shortest one in his second grade class, he was big enough to look like he should be in school. Harry wondered what he could do. If he traveled only from when school was out until sunset, he would not get very far very fast. Harry pulled out a banana and thought some more.

The only thing he could think of was to be very careful in traveling, and try to not be noticed unless it was after school hours. Or the weekend, he thought with a smile. He could walk as much as he wanted on the weekend. Satisfied with that plan, Harry walked down

the street until he found an alleyway going the direction he wanted and ducked into the alleyway. He would not draw so much attention here, he reasoned.

As evening came around, Harry found a secluded place in another park and settled in. This was a rather nice place. He found a thicket of bushes to hide in and there was a water fountain. The park even had a public restroom. As much as he hated to do it, he ended up taking a wad of toilet paper, figuring he would need it later. Also, late at night, he stripped down and sort of had a bath, using a sock and the sink. Changing into his one other set of clothes, Harry washed out the set he had been wearing. This showed him some more things he had not thought about. Although he was not scared, he was starting to wonder if his adventure was such a good idea. He was not ready to give up and go find an orphanage yet, but he was starting to see some good reasons to go there.

The next morning was Friday, and Harry decided to stay where he was, until he noticed a lot of people in cars going to an area a few blocks away. He could see just far enough down the street that it was obvious where they were going, and his curiosity got the better of him. Grabbing his stuff, he started walking to see what everyone was doing.

Fifteen minutes later, Harry was standing in a large car park in front of a building that had lots of people going in. Mingling into the crowd, he soon found himself in a train terminal. It did not take him long to see signs for London with a lot of numbers next to them. He stood to the side to think about this. Harry did not want to get lost or stranded somewhere that might be bad.

If he took a train in, it would save him a lot of walking time, but it might also mean he got caught on the train with no place to run and hide. Even he could see that jumping off of a moving train would not be a good idea. The ones that did not stop were whizzing by.

“Bah, I missed my normal train. I won’t get to London on time now.”

The words from the man in front of him caught his attention. He watched the man look at the board trying to determine what he was going to do.

"Maybe I can make the 7:47," the man said as he started to walk off.

In a fit of bravery, or else extreme foolishness, Harry followed after the man, doing his best to stay near without bumping into him. A few minutes later, the man came to a barrier and swiped his card on top of the barrier and pushed his way through some metal arms that turned.

Harry was almost in a panic, he was going to lose his guide. Noticing that he could fit under the metal arms, Harry ran forward and squatted down under an empty one. No one shouted at him, so Harry hurried on, barely keeping the man in sight. In fact, when he came to a clear space, Harry decided to run. Soon, he was right behind the man again and standing on a platform with a lot of other people, most of them men. As he came to a standstill, he noticed his heart was beating very quickly; he was not sure if it was from running or that he was a little scared.

A few minutes later, a white train pulled into the station and the man walked onto it. Harry followed, grabbing onto a pole just like the man did. When the train started moving, Harry grew even more apprehensive. It would be so easy to get caught here, but he screwed up his courage and held onto the pole with one arm and his grocery bag with the other arm. His book bag was still on his back.

A number of stops went by. Harry thought they were part of London, but he really had no idea. All he could do was watch the man every time the train stopped. Eventually, the train came to another stop and many people left, including the man, so Harry left too. A few minutes later, he had climbed some steps, including some moving ones, and he was up on the streets of London. It was a very busy place. He could not help staring; it was all so very amazing.

Walking around for hour or so led Harry to a very nice park. The sign said it was Hyde Park, but that did not mean anything to him. Exploring some more, he found a lake and a little eating place. At

least they had tables and chairs, and the little building nearby advertised food.

Harry wondered if he should spend money on some or if he should hold on to it and eat what was in his bag. As he thought about that, he watched a man carry a steaming drink and a very nice looking pastry over to a table and sit down. A few seconds later, the man got up and walked back over to the little building as if he had forgotten something. Harry looked at the pastry with a watering mouth wishing he had it, as he was feeling hungry, but he did not dare go over. Besides, it would be stealing, but the pastry did look really good.

Before he realized what had happened, his hands started to tingle and the pastry flew through the air to him. With reflexes built by having to dodge his cousin, Harry grabbed it out of the air and then ducked down behind the bush he was standing next too. Doing his best to look through a gap in the bush, Harry saw the man walk back over to his table with napkins in his hand, then look around for someone or something. It was not hard to guess what he was looking for, as Harry had it in his hand. He considered going over and giving it back, but since it was in his somewhat dirty hand, he doubted the man would want it back. And how would he explain having it? So not knowing what else to do, Harry ate the pastry. After that, he dug out some more fruit, picking the two he thought would spoil first, and ate them as well.

While he ate, Harry thought about what had happened to him. He had no idea why something would fly to him if he wished for it hard enough; he could see that it had to be true now that it had happened to him twice. But why could he do that? It did not take long for the memories of his uncle shouting at him to come to mind. His uncle called him a freak and yelled when he done a few other unexplained things. Those were the times when life was worst with the Dursleys. So maybe he was a freak.

Harry drank the last of his "old water" and thought some more. All he could come up with was that he was different in some way, but that he did not know enough to know what his "power" was or what was going on. And that tingling he felt just before something happened. Was that part of his "power"?

As Harry came out of the bushes, he almost ran into a man.

“Sorry, I didn’t see you,” he said in a quiet voice and made to go around the man, but the man moved over and blocked Harry’s path.

“Are you lost? I can help you.”

Harry looked up at the man, but even though he was smiling, there was something about his smile that Harry did not like.

“No, I’m fine.” He did not sound very confident, but that was because he was scared. He hoped he did not sound or look as scared as he felt.

The man looked at the bag in his hand and Harry saw the man look him over with a critical eye. “I think you’re lost. Why don’t you come home with me so I can help you?” The smile seemed to harden into something that was a smile but not a smile.

Harry was not sure how he knew, but he knew the man was lying about helping him. “No!” Harry was starting to panic. Looking around, he saw a woman pushing a pram coming their way. “No, I won’t go with you,” he said in a louder voice, hoping the woman heard him. Fortunately, she did and she slowed down to look the scene over.

The man’s smile dropped as he said, “I’ll see you later,” before he walked quickly off.

The woman looked at him. “Are you all right?” she asked with much concern.

“Yeah, I’m fine, thanks. I better get back to my dad.” He pointed towards the little café area behind him and hoped that sounded believable.

“OK, if you’re sure,” although she did not sound like she believed him as she glanced over to where he had pointed.

Harry nodded and turned around. Walking back, he saw the line to buy food had several people in it and all were men. To keep up appearances, Harry walked over and stood near one of the men, who looked at him and then ignored him. Looking back he saw the woman watching him, so he waved. She looked for a few more seconds and then continued on her way, shaking her head slightly.

Harry almost wilted with relief. He moved over to an empty table and sat down for a minute. His fear from the encounter with the man was slowly going away, but he was still trembling on the inside. He did not know what had set his mental alarms off, but he did not trust that man who had talked to him. Safety was another thing Harry had not thought about. Though he could not say how, Harry felt that man was as more of a threat than Dudley and his gang had ever been. He wondered how he was going to deal with that these sorts of problems in the future.

When he felt a little better, Harry got up and moved to a bench in the shade not far from the café. The café seemed like a safe place for some reason, but he also knew he could not stay there. But the bench, the bench was not part of the café and it seemed almost as safe, so he stayed there watching the people walk by and the ducks at the edge of the lake.

As lunchtime came, Harry dug out some packaged foods from his bag and ate them, sipping water from his new bottle of water. As he ate, he noticed a girl old enough to be out of high school in a red shirt and jeans walk by. She looked at him strangely but left him alone.

Harry stayed on the bench, still watching people. Shortly, he saw a girl in yellow who looked a little older than the other girl walk by and sit with the girl in red. They ate a little and talked. As he watched them, Harry wished he had a friend like that, but Dudley had made sure he never had friends, which made him feel a little sad. And what about now that he was on his own? After some thought, he decided it would be hard to have a friend this way too. Harry sighed as noticed that the girl in yellow walked by him again, back the way she had come from.

About the time he was about to get up and walk around some more, to try to find a place to stay for a few evenings, he heard a soft voice.

“Do you mind if I sit on the other end of this bench?”

His head jerked around and he saw the girl in the red shirt looking at him. Not sure what to do, he shook his head.

“Thanks.” She sat down and looked out over the lake. Neither said anything for a moment.

“My name’s Gina. What’s yours?” She had a pleasant and kind voice.

He saw her studying him, so he looked her over. She did not seem threatening like the man, but he was still wary of her. “Harry,” he finally answered her.

She smiled at him. “It’s a nice view, isn’t it? I’ve always like watching the ducks.”

Her voice was very calm and reassuring, but he was not ready to trust her. “Yeah,” he said after a moment.

Gina looked back at the lake for a moment before she looked back at him. “Harry, you’re looking a little thin. Do you need food or money for food?”

That startled him. Was that why everyone was looking at him? He was not sure what to say. When he did not immediately answer, she went on.

“It’s OK, Harry. I understand, really I do,” she said sincerely.

He managed not to make a face, but he really doubted she understood. Still, she felt trustworthy, the opposite of that man who had tried to take Harry home with him. But could he really trust her?

She smiled again. “I can see you don’t believe me.”

Was he that obvious?

"I was like you once," she told him, still in her calm and gentle voice. "I had a nice home and it was a great place to live until I was ten and my dad died. It was really hard on my mum, trying to take care of me and my little sister. She was five at the time. My mum worked really hard to support us, but it wasn't enough. To get enough money for us to live, she married my step-dad. He seemed nice at first, but mum didn't really get to know him very well before they married."

Gina paused and looked away. Harry had a feeling this was not going to be a happy story.

"When I turned twelve, I found out what my step-dad was really like. He made me do things that weren't very nice and threatened to hit me if I didn't. And he did hurt me couple of times to prove it." She turned back to look at Harry with a very sad look, as if she did not like to remember. "I stayed in that bad situation because I thought I had done something wrong and that was the price I had to pay. I also stayed to protect my little sister. But the day after her twelfth birthday, he tried to do something bad to my little sister too. I grabbed her hand and ran out the door before he could. We ran away."

Harry watched a tear go down her cheek as he thought about the story. She did understand. He did not know what had happened to her, but he could tell it was bad. And she had been hurt, probably hit a few times like he had. "What happened then?" he asked, more caught up in her story than he had expected to be at the beginning.

Gina wiped the tear away and managed to smile a little. "A neighbor helped me and my sister. She called the police, who helped us with a place to stay, and they took my step-dad away. We got to go live in place where there were other boys and girls who couldn't stay at home. My sister is still there and likes it most of the time, at least when the boys don't pick on her and try to ask her out." She chuckled at the last part.

Harry did not understand the joke, but he understood that it was not a bad place. "You mean at an orphanage?"

The girl raised an eyebrow. "You've heard of them?"

"Yeah, my uncle threatens me with them all the time," he admitted a little angrily.

Gina shook her head. "I suppose there are bad ones around, but they're not all bad. I could take you to where my sister is. They can help you, Harry."

"They could also take me back," he quickly said. He did not believe he could trust them.

"No, Harry, they won't. If you have troubles, they will help you," she pleaded, trying to convince him.

"But, what if they don't believe me?" he argued. "I told the school nurse once and what happened was I got thrown into my cupboard without food for three days."

Her face seemed to melt and a tear started going down her cheek again. "Oh Harry, I'm so sorry, but this place really will help you. They helped me and my sister -- honestly."

Harry did not know what to say or do. He looked back at the lake. It was tempting. There was so much he had not thought about when he ran away, but he had trouble saying yes. He had never had anyone to rely on before, so he had always taken care of himself.

After a long silent pause, Gina said, "Harry, I'll make you a deal. I know you have no real reason to trust me, but if you need more time to think about it, you can come stay with me. I live in a small flat, but you can stay on the couch. It's just me and my roommate, Britney, or Brit as she likes to be called. She was the person eating with me a while ago. It will give you a place to stay that's safe, warm, and has a bathroom and food. We're both in the uni and we're not always there. So if you can trust me to come and stay there, I'll trust you not to do anything bad to the place. Then once you've decided what to do, I'll help you get there."

It sounded like a good offer, but she was right about his thoughts. Could he trust her?

Gina held up her hand when he did not say anything. "I promise, Harry. I won't make you go anywhere you don't want." She lowered her hand. "If you like, I can even arrange for you to talk to them on the phone before we go. I really mean it when I say I'll do whatever I can to help you."

Harry looked into her eyes. He did not know if it was right, but his uncle had said you could tell if a person was trustworthy by their eyes. Gina's dark blue eyes held his green ones. Slowly, he nodded. "OK, if you promise to let me decide."

She smiled. "I promise, Harry. You won't regret it."

"I can help at your place, you know, clean, cook, that sort of thing," he told her sincerely.

A chuckle escaped her and a large smile lit her face. "Careful, Harry, if you do that, we might want to keep you there."

He gave her a grin back, the humor was infectious after the serious conversation.

"All right then," she stood and held out her hand. "Let's go take the Tube to my place and get you settled. Brit has class this afternoon and will be back by dinner time, so you can meet her then."

Harry looked at her hand, willingly held out to him, and tentatively reach out and took it. He really hoped he had made the right choice.

After a ride on the same sort of white train again, Gina led him to a big block-shaped building that was four stories tall. "It's not the prettiest place, Harry, but it works for those of us who don't have a lot of money." He nodded. "Because I don't have much, I got free money to help me go to school, and I've got a small stipend for a part-time job at the uni. I barely make it by living here with a roommate, but it works."

She led him up the stairs to the third floor. The door had “301” on it. The building looked a little run down, but he had seen worse on some of the movies on the telly, for the few times he had sneaked in to watch it. Inside wasn’t much better, but after a minute to look around, he realized that most of the problem was that it was messy and disorganized. Maybe they did need him.

“Yeah, I know, it’s not much and it needs cleaning, but we’re not here much either, or when we are, we’re having to revise for class.” Gina locked the door behind them. Walking in, she started pointing. Down that little hall at the end is the one bathroom here. Brit’s room is on the left, mine is on the right. The kitchen is around there, and as you can see, we eat at the bar here.” There were two tall stools. “I guess we’ll have to eat in shifts, but that won’t be a problem because Brit and I almost never eat together. I tend to have classes or my job in the afternoon and evenings, while she has her things in the mornings and afternoons.”

Harry looked at her in confusion.

Gina smiled again. “Yes, that means I have to leave you soon, but I should be back before Brit gets here and freaks out. You’re lucky I don’t have anything planned for tonight. Now, did you have lunch?”

Harry nodded.

“OK, I’ll take your word for it, but you’re so thin that if you even think hungry thoughts, I want you to get some food out of the fridge or the cabinets. I’ll be back in about three hours, or a little after five; Brit will be here at six. I’ll cook dinner for us. OK?”

Harry nodded again, still not sure what to say.

“You’re a quiet one, but that happens sometimes. I’ll lock the door behind me and you stay here. You can watch the telly as long as you don’t turn it up too loud. Feel free to take a nap on the couch if you want. Remember, I’m trusting you Harry.” She fixed him with a look, as if judging his character, and he did not want to disappoint her.

“Thank you, Gina. I’ll be good, you’ll see.” He meant every word too.

“I’m sure you will. Back soon,” she told him as she walked out and locked the door behind her.

Harry set his two bags down and looked around. It was not a very big place, but it did not feel cramped. Then again, maybe that was because he was used to staying in a cupboard underneath stairs. He explored the place, finding it much like Gina had described it. Off of the kitchen was a little room she had skipped. It had a small washer and dryer along with a lot of boxes and cleaning supplies. It was their storage room he assumed. There was also a very small balcony. It had enough room to stand on and close the door, but that was about it. He supposed it was there so a person could open the door for air and not fall out.

Walking to the other end, he peaked into the bedrooms. They were even messier than the rest of the house. He did not stay in Brit’s room long. Just inside the door was a pile of clothes on the floor, including some pink knickers on top. Greatly embarrassed, he quickly shut her door and checked out the bathroom. It needed help too. He did not even open Gina’s bedroom door.

Harry decided to help them, since they were being so nice to help him. Putting his aunt’s instruction to use, he searched for and found some cleaners and a rag, then started on the bathroom. He decided the kitchen then the living room could come next. He would avoid their bedrooms as that seemed personal, and he would only straighten the storage room to be able to work in there better.

Gathering all the towels hanging up and lying around, he dumped them in the washer and also threw his extra set of clothes in and started them washing while he cleaned.

“Harry? Sorry I’m late, but I’m home” Gina called as she walked into her flat. When she turned around after locking the door, she gasped. He had cleaned them out, was her first thought. Then her nose caught a whiff of something. Sniffing, she smelt something really good.

"Hi," Harry shyly said as he came out from the kitchen.

"Harry, what have you been doing this afternoon?" she asked suspiciously.

He instantly hung his head. "I only wanted to help," he said in a very small voice. He hoped she was not mad at him.

Gina dropped her backpack and quickly went over to him and knelt down. "Harry, it's OK. Just tell me what happened and we can fix it." She reached up to put her hand on his shoulder and he flinched backwards. She mentally berated herself for forgetting that she would have to take it slow with him. "It's OK, Harry. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to make you think I was going to hurt you. I was only going to put my hand on your shoulder to comfort you." He looked at her as if judging her and she mentally wanted to haul someone to the police for hurting this little boy.

"You're really not mad that I cleaned?" he asked hopefully.

She almost laughed at the thought. "Harry, when I said that if you cleaned that we might have to keep you, I was joking. You'd don't have to clean to stay here. I'm sorry that I made you think that." She sighed deeply. "I truly should have known better than to say something like that. I thought much the same thing when I ran away too. You know, that if I was very helpful then they wouldn't take me back." He nodded. She smiled to try to make him feel better and he responded slightly. "Let's take a look to see what you did."

At that, Harry perked up. "My sauce!" He practically ran for the kitchen.

Gina followed him and stopped at the edge of the room. The kitchen was so spotless it was better than when they had moved in. Harry stood on a chair at the stove and stirred a pan of red sauce. Another pan bubbled gently with steam rising; she could not tell what was in it, but there was a package of spaghetti noodles nearby. On the counter was sort of a pitiful looking salad, but then, they had very little salad vegetables in the fridge, so he did not have much to work with.

"That smells very good, Harry. How did you do that?" She wondered what other surprises he had in him.

He smiled bashfully. "It's spaghetti sauce and what my aunt always makes me cook. You didn't have everything, so I had to, er, do what I could." He hung his head and rushed on. "I'm sorry, but I'll do better next time."

Gina wanted to hug him so badly. "Harry, you did great with what you have. It smells very good." She saw him look up with a hopeful look. Turning a little, she looked back to the storage room and saw that it had been straightened and there were two bags of garbage waiting. She would have to take that out later. "Why don't you put the noodles in and we can go look at the rest of the place."

He nodded, turned down the heat for the sauce to low, added the noodles to the hot water, and got off the chair he was standing on and followed her. Looking carefully now, she saw that the living room was also very clean, vacuumed too. She peeked in Brit's room and saw that it was still messy.

"I didn't do your bedrooms. They seemed ... private," he said shyly.

Gina looked down and saw several pairs of Brit's knickers on the floor and felt she understood his blush. "That's probably for the best. It will teach us to keep our rooms clean," she told him with a smirk, trying to hold her laughter in.

She opened the last door and found the bathroom to be clean again. She turned around and looked at him with the happiest face she could muster to try and build his self-confidence. "Harry, I am so impressed you could do all of this in the time I was gone, and you did such a good job of it too. I think most boys would not do such a good job, but you did." He was looking down at his hands as she praised him, but he was smiling now. She decided to try to build him up some more. "You did such a good job that I could hug you." His head jerked up and looked at her with wide eyes. "May I hug you? Please?"

He continued to look at her, just as he had in the park before deciding to come home with her. Finally he nodded.

Gina very slowly knelt down on one knee and slowly put her arms out and wrapped them around him and gave him a gentle hug; he stood there stiffly. "I think you are a good person, Harry, not because you cleaned our place, but because you have a good heart. Even if you don't understand that, know that I think you're a good person and I'm happy I've met you." She felt him slowly move his arms and place his hands on her back to return the hug. With a little squeeze, she let him go and pulled back. What she found surprised her -- he was crying.

"Harry, it's OK, there's nothing wrong." For the life of her, she did not understand. To her surprise, he launched himself at her and hugged her, this time holding very tightly. "Are you all right, Harry."

He nodded against her shoulder. "It's the first time I've ever had a hug and it feels so nice," he murmured in her ear.

The tears started to flow again as Gina returned his hug and rubbed his back slowly. Now she understood. Sure, she had been yelled at and called some nasty things, but most of her abuse had been physical, hits or touching. She guessed most of Harry's abuse had been emotional. He said he had been starved and hit too, but this little boy had been neglected and never really loved. At least she had her sister and mother; Harry had never had anyone.

By the time they both had finished their cry, Gina heard the front door open and her roommate call out, "Gina?" then, "GINA!"

Gina chuckled. "I'll bet she'll be surprised," she whispered to Harry, who gave her a shy smile back. "It's all right, Brit," she called back over her shoulder. "We've just had a little help." She turned and looked towards the living room and saw her roommate with an incredulous look on her face looking at her. She stood and moved so Harry could be seen.

"Brit, we have a visitor and he decided to give us overworked students some help. Brit, meet Harry. Harry, meet Brit. She may tease you, but she's really a nice person anyway."

Harry actually giggled nervously and Gina took that for a good sign for him feeling better.

“Thanks,” Brit told her sarcastically. “What happened to this place and what is that smell?”

“My sauce and noodles!” Harry ran towards and past Brit, who watched him with amazement.

Gina smiled. “Let’s talk in your room, but we won’t have long for the moment.”

Brit looked questioningly as she followed after her friend. She stopped and peered in the bathroom on the way. “It’s totally clean too.”

Ginny pulled her in and quietly closed the bedroom door. “Yeah, everything but our bedrooms is now clean.”

“But how? And whose kid is he?”

Gina made a face to show her distaste of the situation and swallowed before she explained in a soft voice. “Look I can give you the details later, but the really short version is that while we were having lunch, I noticed him on the bench behind you. I also noticed all the signs that he had run away from home and needed help.”

Brit looked at her as if she was crazy. “Gina, have you lost your mind? They’ll get you for kidnapping,” she hissed, trying to keep her voice down.

“No, because I barely got him to come here. He’s been abused, much like me and he needed a safe place for awhile.”

“Then take him to where you went, they can help him there,” Brit said a little forcefully, trying to drive the point home.

“I can’t, Brit, he won’t let me,” Gina said, still talking quietly. “He almost ran away from me. He’s got serious trust issues. I told he

could stay here on the couch until he was ready for me to take to the place my sister is. It should only be for a few days, a week at most.”

Brit exhaled loudly. “I should have known this would happen when you tried to take in that stray cat a while back.”

Gina snorted. “That’s not the same sort of thing. You can’t kick him out, Brit. Someone else would find him, someone who would be mean to little boys. Please, Brit,” Gina begged.

Brit looked up as if asking for divine advice. “OK, for a few days.”

“Thanks!” Gina hugged her friend.

“I do have to admit that he did a good job on the place. If the kitchen is anywhere near as clean as the bathroom, we may have to keep him ...” The look on her friend’s face made Brit stop. “What?”

“Please don’t joke about that. I said the same thing earlier, and this is what I got when I came home. He’s in the state where he might do literally anything to please us, if he thinks that’s what it will take to stay here,” Gina explained.

“Seriously?” Brit asked incredulously.

“Yeah, seriously. But come on, we need to get back in there.”

“Wait!” Brit grabbed her friend’s arm. “How can he do all of this?”

Gina looked sad. “I’m not certain, but the obvious answer is probably the correct one.”

“You mean they made him do this sort of thing all the time.” Gina nodded. “At his age?” Gina nodded again. “Bastards!” Brit spit out.

“I know, and I suspect that was the least of the things they did to him.”

Brit grabbed her friend’s arm again, when she started to go. “Do you think they, you know, sexually abused him?”

Gina shrugged. "I don't know. My gut feeling is no, but I really don't know. I do know that they never loved him -- not ever. Just before you came, I gave him a hug for doing such a good job. He told me it was the first hug he ever had."

"Bastards!" Brit snarled again.

"Yep," Gina solemnly agreed. "For now, put on your happy face and let's go have dinner."

Harry was not sure what was taking them so long, but he guessed they were talking about whether he could stay here or not. He really hoped he could; this was a lot nicer than the park, even the one with the bathroom.

He had three place settings on the bar. He was not sure where he would eat, but sitting on the floor would probably work. By the time they came in, it was all dished up with three glasses of water too.

"I'm really impressed, Harry," Brit told him. "I think this is cleaner than when we moved in."

"That's what I told him too," Gina said.

Harry smiled and looked down at his hands. He had used a rag and cleaners, but he had found that afternoon that when he wished really hard for whatever he was working on to be clean, that his hands seemed to tingle and the area was clean. In some ways, it was like when his hands tingled and the pastry flew to him this morning. He wished he had found that ability before, as he would have completed the chores for Aunt Petunia faster.

"Hmm, we have a small problem," Gina said. "Harry, how would you like to sit in my lap while we all eat."

Harry shook his head bashfully. "Oh no, there's no need. I'll just sit on the floor. I would only be in your way."

"Nonsense, Harry." Gina sat on one of the stools, putting her feet on the rungs. "Come over her," she patted her lap. "You don't weigh enough to be a problem. Come on," she beckoned him.

Deciding to humor her, he walked over and she easily lifted him up to her lap.

Brit put two of everything in front of them before she took a setting and sat on the other stool. "So, Harry, do you have a last name?"

He looked at her and grew fearful. If she knew, would she call his uncle or aunt? Harry shook his head. A second later, he felt Gina squeeze him slightly with the arm around his waist that was holding him on her lap.

"Harry, don't worry, we won't send you back" Gina assured him. "We're just trying to get to know you."

Brit nodded. "That's right, Harry. I won't send you back either, and I'm sorry if I scared you. You can stay here with us."

"Really?" he brightened with hope.

"Really," Brit assured him. "Right, Gina?"

"Right you are, Brit."

Harry smiled his happiest smile. He had a new home, or really a home for the first time. Maybe, just maybe, they would even love him one day.

"So, how old are you and what do you like to do in school?" Brit asked.

"Uh, seven. I'm in the second grade." Harry felt really good as he made himself comfortable in Gina's lap, feeling like he really belonged some place for the first time in his life.

In northern Scotland, the Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Wizardry and Witchcraft walked into his office after dinner, a very fine dinner he thought. He was about to sit down at this desk to handle the small mountain of paperwork when one of the little silver trinkets on his shelf made a light whistling noise and started puffing black smoke.

Slightly concerned, he went over to see which one it was, as he had several monitors. He became even more concerned when he saw it was not any of the ones that monitored the castle, but the one that monitored Harry Potter. Specifically, it was the one that monitored the wards around his aunt's house.

"Tilly!" he called out.

A pop sounded and an odd little character was standing in front of him. "Yes, Headmaster?"

"Tilly, please find Professor McGonagall and tell her I need to see her as soon as possible. Then go find Professor Flitwick and tell him that he's in charge of the school for a few hours while Professor McGonagall and I handle an emergency off of the school grounds."

"Yes, Headmaster," the little elf told him and left with another pop.

He turned back to his shelf and looked at the instruments again. There was no doubt, the wards were down. The other instrument trained on Harry was acting very bizarrely, as it was spinning far too fast. He contemplated that until a knock on his door was heard. "Enter," he called.

"Albus? Tilly said there was an emergency." McGonagall sounded very concerned.

He turned around to see a worried looking deputy. He suspect she was about to become a lot more worried and probably angry at him. "Yes, we must travel to Surrey."

“Surrey?” She looked at him oddly for a second before suspicion came over her. “Do you mean to check on Harry Potter?”

“Yes.” While he sounded calm, he was not on the inside. Little shocked or alarmed him at his age, but he feared it might happen tonight.

“Haven’t you checked on him before?” Her eyes narrowed and her lips thinned as if she suspected the worst.

Albus knew those signs and prepared for the worst. “I’ve had a long-time friend who’s a squib living nearby. She’s given me a few unusual reports on him, but nothing alarming.”

McGonagall’s frown grew. “And why do you think there’s an emergency then? What did she say?”

Her gaze was piercing, but he did his best to ignore it. “I have a monitor on the wards on his house, and the monitor says they’ve failed. Therefore, we need to investigate. Come, let’s use the Floo to the Leaky Cauldron and we can Apparate from there.”

She quickly moved in front of him to block his path. “What aren’t you telling me, Albus? I can tell you’re leaving something out.”

He wondered if his Occlumency skills were slipping if she was able to figure that out. “I have another monitor on his health. It is working, but it is acting strangely. It’s spinning too fast.”

“And that means what?”

“I don’t know, Minerva. Believe it or not, I don’t know. This shouldn’t happen.” While he was concerned about the wards going down, there was a good reason or two that could cause that. Not that they were good situations, but it could happen and for Harry to be quite alive, as his health monitor indicated. But the strange actions of the health monitor mocked him for his lack of knowledge and he did not like that. The health monitor spinning faster should mean that Harry was extremely happy, but that did not make sense with the wards collapsing. “Come, we must be off to investigate.”

McGonagall finally nodded and turned, going first through the Floo Network. Albus was about to leave when he heard sharp whistle and then a small poof. He looked over at his shelf and saw that Harry's health monitor had just exploded and was now in about a half dozen pieces. He was officially alarmed.

Throwing a pinch of Floo powder into the fireplace, he followed his Deputy. He had barely arrived at the sparsely populated Leaky Cauldron when he heard the crack of her leaving. She was rarely that loud, so she must be in a hurry. He took an extra second to quiet his down.

Dumbledore quietly appeared in front of #6 Privet Drive, just in time to see Minerva stride up to the door of #4 and knock. He quickly walked over to join her and arrived just as the door opened. A tall thin woman answered the door.

"Oh, it's you. Unless you're going to fix it, go away and never come back." She stood there glaring at them, as if daring them to do something odd.

"Mrs Dursley," Albus started in his best grandfatherly voice. "Might we come in to discuss Harry? Even though it is now becoming night, it might be better than discussing this on your porch."

She looked like she had eaten something distasteful, but she nodded and opened the door enough they could enter. She quickly closed the door behind them.

"Well, are you going to fix his mess?" she demanded to know.

"Perhaps if you could explain the problem, I could answer the question." Minerva was quiet for now and letting him handle the problem, and Albus was extremely grateful for that.

"The thief stole 3000 Pounds Sterling, that's what he did," she shrieked. Her comment seemed to cause heavy footsteps on the stairs behind her.

“Who’s here, Petunia?” When he rounded the corner, the very large man turned red. “Oh, them,” he spat. “So, are you going to give us the money or not?”

“I’m afraid I don’t understand,” Dumbledore told them, and saw confusion on Minerva’s face too. “Why would he steal money from you?”

“Because the bloody freak ran away! He took my spare money and then ran away!” Spittle was starting to fly out of Mr Dursley’s mouth.

“When?” McGonagall quietly asked. “When did he leave?”

“Three days ago,” Petunia coldly told them. “He left Wednesday after school, taking our money and enough food that it took me fifty Pounds to replace it.”

Dumbledore detected a lie on the food, but that was unimportant at the moment. “What did the authorities say when you contacted them about his leaving?”

“We didn’t,” Petunia told them. “We were waiting on you, since he’s yours anyway.”

Albus wanted to pull his glasses off and rub his temples as he felt a headache coming on, but he resisted the desire. Instead, he closed his eyes for a moment to contemplate the situation.

“Albus!” he heard a Scottish brogue starting to become prominent. That was even a worse indicator of how much trouble he was going to be in when he got back to the castle.

“Mr and Mrs Dursley, thank you for the information, we shall be in touch.” He turned to leave.

“What about our money?” Vernon Dursley shouted.

“As I said,” Dumbledore threw back over his shoulder, “we’ll be in touch.” He thought he might have heard a spell being cast as he walked out the door, but decided that it was better not to know.

Perhaps that little dally would help her to relieve some stress and not cast it upon him. He Apparated back to the gates of the school. The walk in the cooler night air would do him some good.

He heard a loud crack behind and then a thick Scottish brogue. "Albus, 'ow are ye goin' to fin' 'im?" That was the magic question, he thought. As the prophecy came to mind, he became thankful she did not know about it. "Well?" he heard from her again. It was definitely going to be a long night.

Harry's week with Gina and Brit stretched into two. As the third week started and Harry not making any move to leave, Gina brought a cot home with her one day. That evening, she helped Harry move the boxes out of the storage room and reorganize the cleaning supplies. That created enough space for the cot with some space left over. He happily moved into his new bedroom. Even with the small washer and dryer in there, it was over three times as big as he had in his cupboard under the stairs. He had his own room and he was very happy. It was all Gina could do not to cry when she had heard him say that.

The next day, Gina brought home some clothes that fit him, and Brit brought some old boards. When he asked her what the boards were for, she dragged him downstairs to the side of the building and the three of them each picked up as many old bricks as they could carry back up three flights of stairs. Using the bricks as supports, Brit showed him how to make shelves, and Harry had a place for his clothes and a few books.

The first weekend he was there, he looked at their books for a bit, before he picked up one of Brit's history books. It did not take long for them to realize that he would be bored most of the day when he was home and that he was no longer in school. So Brit picked up some old second grade text books from a teacher she knew and brought them home. Harry thought that was great and started working on them, just like Gina and Brit worked on their books. While they did not understand Harry's desire for school at home, they did think his mimicking them was cute.

All the while, Harry kept the entire flat clean, except for the girls rooms and he did most of the cooking. He was really quite happy, except when Gina did not come home until after he went to bed. Brit explained that she was visiting a friend. Harry did not understand why it was so late, especially those times when she did not come home until after Harry got up the next morning. Although not as often, Brit was that way too; however, Harry never complained when she stayed out all night.

Harry stayed with Gina and Brit for the next three years. At the end of that time, both of them graduated from the university and neither would be staying where they had been. All three of them were sad to break up the trio, but it would have to happen as the two girls started their new jobs in other cities.

Gina thought this might be what it took to make Harry go to her old orphanage, but she was wrong. To her surprise, her little sister, Stephanie, moved in to take her place as she started at the university. Steph brought another orphanage friend with her, Ashley. Steph knew Harry quite well by now, having visited her sister quite a bit over the last three years, and in return Harry liked Steph. Ashley was not sure about having a ten year-old boy living with them, but after meeting him and Steph telling her he was like a live-in butler, she agreed.

Harry continued to be happy where he was. He was “home-schooled” with two private tutors for when he got stuck, which was rarely. He was also working nearly a half year ahead of where others his age were. There were a few other kids about his age around and they were friends, playing together in the evening. While he did not get out much during the day, his “big sisters” usually took him out in the evenings. Finally, he had a family of two older sisters and two new sisters, all of whom loved him. Harry “felt” hidden in the large city, was mostly independent, and loved his life.

Albus Dumbledore was a very confused wizard. The irate witch in front of him did not help his present mood any. In many ways, today was a replay of the disastrous night of four years ago.

Minerva McGonagall sat in front of him holding Harry Potter's invitation to Hogwarts. The owl she had given it to had refused to take it. Yet, in the magical birth registry book in front of him, Harry Potter's name was clearly listed. The owl should have taken the letter unless Harry was dead. Yet the magical birth registry book would have stricken Harry's name if he was dead, and it had not. Each situation should not be true at the same time, and yet that was happening.

"Well?" she asked him for the third time that morning.

"I only have one explanation. He must be living under a Fidelius Charm; it is the only explanation that makes sense." He made sure he sounded and looked more confident than he felt about that statement.

"But Albus," she protested. "It is normally only the old Pureblood families that hide their old manor houses like that, and most of them are Dark."

"I know, Minerva." It was a chilling thought to the Headmaster. What would Harry have been taught and what would he be like after living with a Dark family? "We shall just have to be patient and keep our eyes open for him," he said with resignation.

She harrumphed as she stood to leave. Albus knew she was not happy and he was not either, but there was nothing either of them could do.

Harry was walking down the street in London on a very warm day in mid-August, having just finished a day of work. He was fifteen, but he made himself look like he was eighteen. It was one of the "magic" tricks he could do. He just waved his hand over his face and thought about what he wanted to look like, and it happened. When he was honest with himself, he had no idea how he did it, but it was better than those "magicians" seen on the stage. There were a number of useful things he could do, that no one else seemed to be able to do.

Harry was careful not to let others know he had this “power”, as he did not know what would happen if that secret ever came out.

He had learned a lot about secrets over the last eight years, as he had many. Not telling people he was not going to school was one. Instead he told people he went to a private school set up by his parents before they died. Since he knew the sort of things he should, everyone assumed he went somewhere instead of being self-educated along with university-aged tutors. He had worked far enough ahead he was almost ready to take his A-levels.

His stash of money from his uncle was another secret, even Gina never knew. He spent nearly half of it on various necessities before he got his first job at fourteen. Back then, he was a delivery person, mostly documents around the downtown London area. Now, over a year later, he was a “buyer” and helped find unusual things for customers. It was all legal, as he was careful, but some of the people he bought things for had dubious backgrounds, the kind you do not ask about. As long as he was careful and kept his customers happy, his boss was happy and everyone made money.

His newest secret was the time he spent with Amy in flat #217. She was eighteen and a freshman at the university; he thought she was hot. With an “older look” and a few good half-truths, they had started dating a few weeks ago and, if things went well, he wondered if he would be able to convince her to do more than snog soon. She was someone who was very pleasant to think about. Just the thought of her put a smile on his face.

Perhaps Amy was the reason Harry was not watching where he was walking, because as he passed an old bookstore and walked in front of a somewhat shady looking pub, he ran into an older man. The old man was knocked back, but stayed on his feet. Harry fell back on his bum, as he had not had the presence of mind to notice he was falling until it was too late.

“Sorry, Mister,” Harry said as he got up. He really was not all that interested in the old man, but it never hurt to be polite in case he became a future customer. Of course, with the waist length white beard and the hideous purple suit he was wearing, Harry did not think

this was the sort of person that would require his buying and locator service.

“That’s quite all right, my boy...”

Harry did not know why the old man trailed off, but he still was not all that concerned. Brushing his hair back into place, he said, “Glad you’re OK, have a good day.” Turning around, he started walking away.

“Harry? Harry Potter?”

Harry stopped and turned around. How in the world could the strange old man know his name, he wondered. With considerable wariness, he asked, “How do you know me?”

The old man gave him a grandfatherly smile. “I knew you when you were a child, and I also knew your parents and your grandparents. I’ve known your family for many years. Would you like to come with me to hear about them?”

This man knew his family? Harry briefly considered that, then he tossed it out. He had no idea who his birth family was. If this man knew his family, then he probably also knew his aunt and uncle, a place he had vowed never to return to for any reason. That made him very wary.

“No thanks for now, perhaps later. Do you have a card with a phone number?” He did have some curiosity, but until he was eighteen and no one could legally force him to do anything, he had no plans to connect to his past. Now if his parents had been alive, that would have been different.

“No, my boy, I’m sorry I don’t. However, we could go somewhere and talk about them. I know a nice quiet place where we won’t be interrupted,” the old man suggested, still with a grandfatherly smile, and now a twinkle in his eyes.

Warning bells were going off in Harry’s head, much like they were for the man who tried to take him home many years ago when Harry had

first run away. "I don't think so. Sorry I bumped into you." Harry turned and started to walk away. He almost made it to the edge of the area defined by the strange pub when his world went dark.

((A/N: I've always wondered why Harry did not run away, based on what we know of his childhood in the books. I'm sure some of the reason is that he was a child and didn't know what normal was. I also wonder why none of Harry's primary school teachers didn't call Social Services for him. I suppose the obvious answer is that JKR didn't want that to happen. However, I'd like to explore the idea of Harry running away as a child, as well as various ramifications from that. :-)
I know a number of others have used this idea, but this is my version.))

Chapter 2

Harry slowly came to. The first thing he noticed was that he was lying on a bed and not on the sidewalk, which was the last place he remembered being. The second thing he noticed was the voices, particularly that of the old man's. So he lay very still and kept his eyes closed.

"Yes, Molly, I'm sure he's fine. It was only a small scrape and I've healed that. I have picked up a few simple healing charms over the years," the old man said with a light chuckle.

"I just want to make sure, Headmaster," a woman's voice said with a hint of worry. Harry assumed that was Molly. "Well, I'm glad he's finally here. He'll be so much happier with us, but I don't understand why he looked older than fifteen. He looked eighteen or nineteen when you first brought him here. Could he be a metamorphmagus?"

"I don't believe that to be the case. I believe he merely did some accidental magic, as a Finite Incantatum restored his normal looks. A few powerful children have been known to learn one skill consciously, and as he's had to stay hidden for us not to find him, that would make the most sense."

Accidental magic? Harry wondered what the old man meant by that. Surely he could not mean his little "magic trick" to make himself look older, could he?

"I'll keep the children away, but please let me know when he wakes up and I'll bring him some food. That will make him feel more at home here," the woman said confidently, as if food fixed everything.

"Of course, Molly. I'll have a short conversation with him in a minute to explain a few things, and then I'll come get you," he gently assured her.

"Thank you, Albus."

Harry did his best to slow his breathing down and lay very still. A moment later, he heard a door nearby close and then he felt very

energized. Hoping that was a cue to wake up, he slowly opened his eyes. At the end of the bed was the old man, but now he was in some sort of purple dress with little symbols on it, holding a stick, and giving him that grandfatherly smile. Harry was starting to hate that smile.

“Good evening, Harry. My name is Albus Dumbledore and I am an old friend of your family’s, and the holder of a number of titles that I shan’t bore you with. I suppose it would be good manners for me to start off with an apology so as to clear the air between us. I do apologize for stunning you so I could bring you here, but we really needed to have a talk and that would have been very difficult to do with you walking away.”

As evenly as he could, because he was quite angry inside, Harry said, “If you want to clear the air with me, then take me back to where we were before.”

The old man sighed. “Perhaps I should start at the beginning.” He then waved his little stick and a chair appeared so he could sit.

“What the...” Harry so startled he could not even finish the question.

Dumbledore chuckled. “Yes, Harry. This is the world of magic, and I do assure you that it’s quite real. Haven’t you ever done something special that you can’t explain? Like change your looks, perhaps?”

Harry slowly nodded.

“Those were instances of accidental magic. It’s quite common in younger children, primary because they have no magical training. Once you receive your magical training, you won’t have that problem any more either.”

Harry was not sure he wanted to give up what he had, so he said nothing for now. One of the things he had learned in his years of living on the street, was that you needed to know who the players were and what their stake was. In short, he needed information.

“Back when you were a little more than one year-old,” Dumbledore started his story, “your parents were attacked and killed. Fortunately,

you survived the attack and coincidentally returned the Killing Curse back to your attacker, making you the only person ever to survive a Killing Curse. But I'm sure your aunt told you all about that and your parents."

"My aunt," Harry spat out, "never told me shit about my family, other than they were drunks who died in a car accident. I have no family." Except Gina and Steph, he thought, keeping them secret for the moment.

"Actually," Dumbledore went on in his same casual tone, ignoring Harry's outburst, "the Potters have a very long and interesting history. They are a family to be proud of."

Harry snorted dismissively. A flicker of disappointment flashed across the old man's face, but Harry did not care.

"After the attack on your parents, I took you to your aunt's house--"

"What?!" Harry interrupted with a shout. "You're the bastard who took me there?" Long suppressed feelings shot to the surface.

"It was best thing for you, Harry," Dumbledore said.

Hearing the confession, Harry jumped out of bed and rushed the old man intending to show him with a right cross what Vernon had done to Harry, but the old man just waved the little stick and Harry felt his limbs lock up and he tumbled to the ground before delivering the blow, gathering a bruise on his left shoulder when he hit the floor.

Dumbledore waved his stick again and Harry floated back into bed, and another wave released his head, but his arms and legs were still stiff and uncontrollable. "Harry," he sounded disappointed, "you must learn to control yourself."

"You want me to control myself," Harry said through gritted teeth, "around the person that put me into hell where I was beaten, starved, and never loved?" He could only say that to people now after a lot of long talks with Gina.

“Come now, Harry, let’s not exaggerate. No one treats children like that,” he said with a placating tone.

Harry almost laughed. “If you believe that old man, then you’re stupider than you look in that old dress, and I have a lot of land north of Britain to sell you.” As Dumbledore looked at him with a confused look, Harry finally began to entertain the idea that maybe there really was a hidden world. Didn’t everyone use the same expressions?

Dumbledore eventually shook his head as if clearing it. “Nevertheless, after you disappeared eight years ago, we searched for you to bring you back to our world so we could protect you and you wouldn’t be lost again.”

Now Harry laughed, loud and long. “Protect me?” He laughed some more. “Oh, that is so rich. I should show you some of the pictures of how, emaciated is the word I think my guardian used, I was after I ran away.” Dumbledore raised an unbelieving eyebrow at him. “Yes, you ignorant fool, it took her over two month of stuffing me before she said I looked normal for a five year-old, even though I was seven.”

Dumbledore looked thoughtful at that. “If so,” he seemed to concede nothing based on his expression, “then I apologize for that as well, Harry. In the Wizarding World, family is very important and always taken care of.”

“Yeah, well, you didn’t put me in the Wizarding World, did you?” he said sarcastically and rhetorically, but he got an answer anyway.

“No, no I didn’t, but I had very good reasons.”

“What?” Harry asked, still belligerent. “Just as you have good reasons for kidnapping me?”

“I’m sorry you see it that way, Harry. I’m really only trying to help you.”

“Yeah, I keep hearing how sorry you are, but you’re still keeping me here against my will. So, we’ve had your little talk and you know how I grew up, so let me go.”

"I can't do that, Harry. You must stay here because of your heritage and your destiny."

"You can think that if you like, but I don't give a shit about any of that," he said belligerently. "I have a nice life and I want to return to it."

Dumbledore sighed and looked resigned. "I'm sorry, Harry, but I must insist."

"If you're going to insist that I stay kidnapped, then will you at least tell me why? I don't have enough money to be ransomed back." Harry could imagine no other reason for this.

A chuckle came out of the old man. "Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, you'll gain money from this, Harry. Your parents left it to you, just like they wanted you to attend Hogwarts, our magical school."

"As I don't know them and never had a letter telling me that, your idea is meaningless. You're making it up as far as I know." Harry was not going to give an inch without proof.

"You'll understand in time, Harry. Now, we seem to have the introductions over with and I have things to do, so I must leave you for a time. I shall send Molly Weasley up with some dinner for you. Feel free to make yourself comfortable here, but I must ask you not to try to leave. The door won't let you anyway. There are a few others living here besides the Weasleys. In fact, this is your godfather's house, although he is out and will not be back until tomorrow evening. I shall return tomorrow morning and take you shopping for school supplies and clothes."

"Are you going to release me before you leave?" If he was free, Harry thought he could get away.

Dumbledore gave him that infuriating smile and flicked his stick at Harry, and he felt his body loosen up and he could control it again. "Have a pleasant evening, Harry. Talk to some of the others here and I believe you'll make some new friends." With that, the old man left.

Harry wondered what he meant by the door not opening for him. Was it possible make doors open for some and not others? If Dumbledore could create chairs out of nothing, maybe it was possible, but there were always other ways out of a house. He walked over to the grimy window and decided that he did not think much of his godfather if he lived in dilapidated house like this. Harry and Steph's place was not great, but they at least kept the inside clean and presentable. He shook his head and looked out the window. He was on the second floor and nearly thirty feet up -- too high to jump. But there was a big tree over to the side, maybe...

He heard a sound outside his door, so he quickly moved away from the window. In walked a plump woman with red hair and a caring look. She was several inches shorter than he and she was carrying a tray with a plate of food and a drink.

"Hello, Harry. I'm Molly Weasley. I brought you some dinner. You can eat it here or come down to the kitchen. Everyone else has already eaten this evening, but there's usually someone else in the kitchen with me to talk to. If you need the bathroom, there's one at the end of this hall." She stood there looking at him.

He could not decide what to do. He was a little hungry, but he could skip dinner if he had too. Would they put anything into the food? That was the big question in his mind.

"I'll just put this on the dresser and you can decide, but feel free to come down and talk to us. I'm sure you'd enjoy talking to my youngest boy, and I know he would love to talk to you; he's about your age." Molly set the tray down and left, allowing Harry some time to think.

After a moment, he decided that bread would be hard to do something to, so he ate that, leaving the rest. The glass of orange drink, which smelled strange, he took to the bathroom and dumped, washing it as best he could, and then filling the glass with water from the tap. It would have to do for now. He would eat more when he could see others eating from the same bowl. He never thought those military survival shows he had seen on the BBC would be useful.

Having enough to keep his stomach from growling, he picked up the tray of food and took it down. At the bottom of the stairs, he saw a girl a little younger than he was with red hair. It was not hard to guess whose daughter she was.

She blushed furiously and shyly said, "Hi, you must be Harry."

He nodded, wondering what was up with her. "Yeah, and you are?"

"Oh, I'm Ginny, Ginny Weasley." She continued to blush.

"OK. Say, can you tell me where the kitchen is?"

"Oh, sure. Go down those stairs over there. It's in the basement." She seemed to have a hard time looking at his face, making him wonder what was wrong. When he had been in the bathroom, the only difference he had seen in the mirror was that he looked his normal age. Dumbledore must have removed his age disguise after he first stunned him, because his disguise normally lasted all day and into the night.

"Thanks." He turned and went in the direction she had pointed out. He wondered about her and her reaction. She was sorta cute and would probably be nice looking in another couple of years, but he had Amy at the moment.

The kitchen looked only a little better than the rest of the house, mostly because it was cleaner. He assumed that was because Molly was here the most. He put the tray on the long table, as he watched with a little awe at Molly washing dishes by waving her little stick around. The dishes seemed to jump into a sink of soapy water, then jump into a sink of plain water, then jump into a drying rack. That would be useful to know, he thought.

"Oh, hello dear. Finished with dinner?" She looked at his plate. "But you didn't eat anything."

What was it with people looking disappointed, he wondered. Everyone made choices and everyone else was not going to be pleased all the time. "I wasn't very hungry, maybe tomorrow."

"If you're sure..."

Harry managed to avoid rolling his eyes. She nor anyone else could guilt-trip him into doing anything he didn't want to do. He had been the master of that when he was younger and knew what she was trying to do in an instant. He turned to walk back upstairs and explore, but there was Ginny and four others about her age with her. The first was a tall gangly boy with red hair, obviously her older brother, and a girl with bush brown hair, who was not bad looking. In the back was a pair of stocky clones with red hair, causing him to wonder just how many Weasleys there were. All five of them were staring at him.

"What?" he asked.

"Oh, how rude of us. I'm Hermione Granger." The brunette stepped forward and held out her hand. Harry looked at it for a second, then slowly reached out and shook it. "You've already met Ginny, this," she waved at the boy, "is her brother Ron."

"Are you really Harry Potter?" he asked. When Harry nodded, he asked, "Can we see your scar?" He was looking at Harry's forehead as he asked the question.

Hermione glared at her friend while Harry snorted and said, "Don't be an ass, it's just a scar and doesn't mean anything." He heard a gasp behind him, although he had no idea why the woman sounded offended. He saw a smile appear on Ginny's face, as if she was trying to hold in laughter, and the twins were quietly laughing at their brother.

"But you're The Boy Who Lived!"

Harry would swear Ron had said that like a title or something, but he could not figure out why.

"No, I'm just Harry."

“We’re Fred...” said one twin.

“And George,” said the other twin.

“Nice to meet you, clones. If you’ll excuse me.” He walked around the other side of the table and left the kitchen. Upstairs, he started walking around, just looking. He was quite startled to find a painting that was literally watching him. It really moved, and it was freaky.

“Searching for something?”

Harry turned and three of them, minus the clones, were standing there behind him. “I’m just stretching my legs and seeing what’s in the house.”

“Parts of it are fascinating, like the library, but it’s really just an old house,” Hermione told him.

Harry heard Ron mumble something about her and libraries, but he could not figure out what that was about. “Why does it look so bad then? It’s a mess.”

“You should have been here last summer; it was worse then and we had to clean it,” Ron grumbled.

Hermione shrugged. “I don’t know why Sirius doesn’t fix it up, but it’s really hard to clean because of all the Dark magic that’s been done here in the past.”

“Dark Magic?”

“Yes. Magic that’s not wholesome. It can really corrupt you,” Hermione explained, as if it should have been obvious.

“So how do you leave here?” Harry thought it could not hurt to try.

“The front door is that way,” Ron pointed over his shoulder with his thumb.

Hermione scowled at him. "Except that the Headmaster said he set the door so Harry couldn't open it."

"Headmaster?"

"Yes," Hermione seemed to brighten, "Professor Dumbledore, you've met him."

"Oh him," Harry said sarcastically.

Hermione looked at him as if trying to figure out why Harry had said that so unenthusiastically, but he did not care. Checking his watch, he saw that it was a little after nine. "If you'll excuse me, I think I'll turn in."

"Hold on a sec, mate," Ron called out as Harry started to leave. "I have some old pyjamas you can borrow until they take you shopping tomorrow."

"Don't bother, I normally don't sleep in any," Harry told them, and watched the two girls blush, especially Ginny. If he did not know any better, he would say she had a crush on him, but he did not understand why as they had only met a few minutes ago. Oh well, he thought and left them.

In his room, he shut the door, glad he had the room to himself. If he had not, he would have requested one, as he did not trust anyone else here, even the others his age. There were so many questions he could ask, but in the end, he decided they did not really matter. He stripped down and crawled into bed in case anyone checked on him, but he did not go to sleep. Instead, he laid there while he planned and listened for anyone who might come his way. He would wait an hour after he heard no other noises in the house before he executed his plan.

His watch showed it to be almost 1am and he had heard nothing for over an hour. Quietly, he got up and put all of his clothes back on. Very slowly, he opened the window. It squeaked a little, but wasn't

too bad. He listened for a moment, but did not hear anyone else, so he climbed out the window and slowly shut it behind him. He hoped they would not guess how he got out.

Fortunately, there was a ledge for him to stand on, so he walked on it until he got close to the big tree. The jump would not be too hard, but the question was if the limb would support his weight without breaking. There was only one way to find out.

Harry jumped as far as he could and grabbed the limb as it was chest high, using the last couple feet of his fall to slow himself down until he was hanging an arm's length below the limb. He grinned when it held. Hand over hand, he moved himself to the trunk and then climbed down the tree.

As he turned around, he saw a strange sight. The tree was in front of #13 and it did not look like the house he had just left. The style was different than he saw when he was on the ledge, and there was no ledge. Looking the other way, he saw #11. It was like there was a missing and invisible house at #12. Very strange.

He now noticed that the neighborhood was even more run-down than the one he lived in, so he decided to stick to the shadows as much as he could. He also noticed that the glow in the night sky was brighter to his left, so he headed in that direction. At the end of the street, he saw a sign that read "Grimmauld Place". Now he knew where they hid.

With a big breath, he started jogging towards the lights and what he hoped was downtown London. From there, he could easily catch a taxi back home. That made him think to check what he had on him. Feeling in his pockets, he found everything he expected, including his wallet. Pulling that out, he found all of his money, which was good. He slipped it back into his pocket as he continued to jog down the unlighted side of the street. While he had grown up with Gina and Brit, Harry considered himself a street kid, being self-taught in the school of hard knocks. He used his "street senses" now, paying very careful attention to his surroundings.

A quarter hour of jogging and walking brought Harry to a pub that was still open. Luckily, there was even one of those black taxis outside. Thirty quid and fifteen minutes later, he was getting out in front of his apartment building.

In the flat he shared with Steph, he found her asleep and everything else in place. He had a real quandary now. What should he do? Actually, he had been thinking about that question the whole time he was escaping, and he seemed to be no closer to a solution now. One thing was certain, he was going to have to write a letter or two, even if it was almost half two in the morning and he was tired.

Grabbing a pen and some paper, he wrote a letter to Gina explaining what had happened to him. Paranoia struck and he wondered if they would be able to stop his letter too. In a fit of inspiration, he sealed the letter and then took it down to the box for outgoing post and dropped it in. He doubted they would find it there, and so Gina would read it in about a week.

Going back up, he carefully snuck into Steph's room and snatched her diary. This was asking for trouble if she caught him, but he was desperate. He penned another letter describing his day in detail, again including the name of Albus Dumbledore as his kidnapper, along with the admonishment to be very careful in tracking him down should he suddenly disappear. He told her that even though she was about to move out soon, he still planned to stay, so if he disappeared, then he had been kidnapped again by people who knew his parents. These people could do strange things, maybe even make her forget he had left.

That done, he folded that letter up and slipped it into the front of her diary before putting it back in her room. She did not write in it every day, but he knew she would eventually find his letter in her diary. Short of waking her up, he did not know what else he could do. He just hoped they had no way to track him.

Molly Weasley was surprised Harry had not come down to breakfast since he had gone to bed so early. "I better go get Harry. He needs to be up before Professor Dumbledore gets here," she said to the others at the breakfast table.

"I'll go, Mum." Ron quickly got up.

"Nonsense, Ron, finish eating."

"No, Mum, you don't understand. I need get him." Ron was unusually adamant for something like this.

She unconsciously put her hands on her hips. "And why do you have to go get him?" She was surprised to see her son blush.

"Well, because, you see, ah," then he finished very quickly, "he doesn't sleep in pyjamas."

That did not faze the mother of seven. "I thought I told you to lend him some of your old ones."

"I did," he defended himself. "He said he doesn't use them -- ever."

Molly noticed that her son was still slightly embarrassed, while the girls were quite red. It was probably a good thing Sirius was not here for this conversation, or he would probably be trying to do something to embarrass the poor boy. "Fine, go wake him up then."

She worked on finishing her breakfast while Ron was gone. "I know you've already gone shopping, but do either of you need anything else before school starts next week?" she asked the girls.

Ginny shook her head while Hermione said, "No, thank you."

A minute later, Molly heard what sounded like a herd of dragons coming down the steps. Before she could admonish her son, he shouted, "He's gone! Harry's gone!"

"Wait!" she shouted to get their attention. "Let's not jump to conclusions. This is a big house, so let's search it before we panic. I'll take the ground floor. Hermione you have the first floor, Ginny the second, Ron you take the third and the attic. As they ran off, she took a quick peek in all the closets in the basement and then went up.

There was no Harry on the ground floor. Soon, Hermione and Ginny returned, and finally Ron. Harry seemed to have vanished and she wondered how. The door would not open for him and neither would the Floo. "The Headmaster is due in about fifteen minutes. If Harry's been gone all night, then fifteen minutes won't matter. Everyone go finish your breakfast." They all tramped downstairs and waited anxiously.

Albus Dumbledore straightened his robes as he prepared to leave. He had picked plain black one today. True, they were Acromantula silk, but he thought the plain color would be better for Harry. As he thought about Harry's reaction to him yesterday, he chuckled at the idea of him wearing a dress.

There was a knock on his door, so he called, "Enter." As expected it was Minerva. He was unsure where he presently stood with his Deputy, and that was unsettling. Normally, they had a very good professional relationship, but this situation for the last fifteen years with Harry Potter did not make him look good in her eyes. He hoped he could repair some of that damage today.

He was actually quite amazed that she had come to him to ask about young Harry last night. While he had told no one at Hogwarts about Harry's return, she had known anyway. He suspected that Molly had told Minerva, but it really did not matter. What did matter at the moment was that Minerva had insisted on helping Harry shop for school. He had planned on doing that alone, but perhaps a second pair of eyes and an extra wand would be useful. Harry might be a handful when they took him out in public.

Albus still did not totally understand why Harry was so reluctant to join them; most Muggle-borns were very excited to become part of the Wizarding world. Miss Granger was probably at the extreme end of that scale, but he was surprised Harry was not more like her. There always seemed to be one or two Muggle-borns every year who turned down their invitation to Hogwarts, perhaps Harry was closer to that end of the spectrum.

“Are you ready, Albus?”

“Of course, Minerva. After you.” He gallantly waved his hand towards his fireplace. She took the Floo first and he followed after her to Headquarters. To his great surprise, he arrived into a scene of great excitement. Everyone seemed to be trying to talk at once.

“Silence!” he bellowed. Fortunately, everyone obeyed. He turned to the one adult who had been staying there. “Molly, what, pray tell, has happened?”

“He’s gone, Albus, Harry’s gone. Ron went up to wake him up this morning and his bed was empty and he’s nowhere in the house. He’s run away again.” Molly was on the edge of tears, while Minerva was glaring at him.

Dumbledore wanted to rub his temples as he felt a headache coming on, but he resisted the feeling lest others think he was not in control of the situation. “Then we shall have to find him again. Fortunately, it will be easier this time.”

“What do you mean, easier this time?” McGonagall wanted to know.

“When I brought Harry here yesterday, I removed his glamours and placed a tracking spell on him before I woke him up. It may take a little bit of time, but I believe I shall be able to locate him in an hour or so,” he said with a bit of pride for thinking ahead.

“That will be ‘we’, Albus. I’m coming too,” his Deputy told him, and her look indicated he would not be talking her out of it.

“Very well,” he agreed for appearance sake. Molly looked like she wanted to go too, but did not dare leave the children alone. “Molly, it would probably be best for you to stay here with the other students. Minerva and I will find him and bring him back here after we go shopping.”

“As you wish, Professor.” Molly did not look happy, but she had never refused an order or a suggestion from him.

Albus pulled out his wand and set it in his hand. In his mind, he cast, "Point me Harry Potter." The wand twirled slightly and pointed to his left and slightly up. "Hmm, Minerva, let's go to the Leaky Cauldron. That should be enough readings for us to figure out what part of town he is in. From there, we'll probably have to walk. I think Muggle clothing would be appropriate." He transfigured his robes into a black suit, while Minerva changed her robes into a long black dress. Both were of a style from fifty years ago. "Let us be off." He walked over to the fireplace and used it to Floo to the pub with Minerva right behind him.

A few minutes later, Albus determined that Harry was in the north-central part of town. He Side-Along-Apparated Minerva and they started walking. A few people gave him strange looks for holding a stick in the palm of his hand, but they did not say anything to the professors. Half an hour later, they were standing in front of an old building that seemed to be the place, as the wand moved with every step and was point up at an acute angle. After a few minutes of walking up stairs, they were standing outside of a room that had #301 on it.

Dumbledore raised his wand, but before he could cast, Minerva asked, "Shouldn't we knock? It would be the polite thing to do."

"And it would also give him warning, which I don't think is a good idea, given how he was yesterday." She gave him a glare to indicate she thought he had a bad idea, but he cast "Alohamora" anyway. They heard clicking sounds, so Albus opened the door, going in first.

He saw a young blonde girl of twenty-one or so sitting on a stool and Harry rushing around a corner. "Harry! Wait!" Harry did not stop, so Albus hurried in. The girl seemed to be frozen in surprise, which was a help. As he got half-way across the small living room, Harry returned and stood at the corner of the room he had gone into. His body was mostly covered by the bar he stood behind.

"Steph! Get behind me, quick!" Harry shouted. The girl seemed to come out of her stupor and complied. Albus let her go, she was not important here and she would be Obliviated anyway.

“Harry, you need to come with us,” Dumbledore told the lad calmly but firmly.

“Go away, old man, and take her with you!”

Albus looked over his shoulder to make sure Harry was pointing at Minerva. She looked very puzzled, but he did not spare any time for that. Looking back at Harry, he said, “I’m afraid I must insist. You belong with us.”

“Insist all you want, old man. The only way you’re taking me back is with a fight and knocking me out me again.”

He looked at the serious face on the young man. Despite the seriousness of the situation, Albus was pleased. Here was a young man who could face pressure and handle it well.

“Then I’m truly sorry, Harry.” He raised his wand and suddenly felt a hand stopping him.

“Wait, Albus.” Minerva stepped forward. “Harry, my name is Minerva McGonagall and I was one of your parent’s teachers and mentors. They loved the world we live in. Yes, your mother enjoyed her Muggle roots, but her real home was in the Wizarding world. Don’t you want to join that?”

“No! I like my life now, so just go away and leave me alone. Besides, if I did want to check out your world, kidnapping me and forcing me to go there is not the way to do it,” Harry said adamantly.

Minerva considered that and turned to him. “Albus, he’s absolutely right. It is his choice. Attendance at Hogwarts is not mandatory. Since he doesn’t seem to trust you at the moment, perhaps I could write him letters or meet with him to explain our world better. In time, he may choose to join us. But it is clear to me that we must leave.”

“Finally, some sanity,” Harry muttered.

Albus really wanted to keep this secret, but he also knew Minerva could be trusted. “You don’t know the big picture and understand

Harry's role in it, Minerva. He must come with us for the greater good."

"Is this another one of those reasons you wouldn't tell me anything about?" Harry asked with derision in his voice.

"Yes, Albus," Minerva said. "If there is a real reason beyond his magical nature, you would do well to tell us."

"It's because he's not safe here, and you know from whom." McGonagall looked surprised. He turned to Harry. "Harry, you must come with us because the man who killed your parents has returned and he will eventually come seek you out to kill you too."

"Nice try, old man, but the only person threatening me is you. I've been quite safe where I am for the last eight years. Go away and forget me."

Dumbledore hated to do it, but he quickly raised his wand and thought, "Stupefy". While he cast the spell and watched it speed towards Harry, the boy amazed him by raising a metal pan up and blocking the spell with it, causing the red beam to ricochet over and hit the wall, leaving a small burn mark there.

Harry smiled at him, so Albus silently cast, "Expelliarmus". Again Harry held up the pan, but this time the pan went flying out of hand when the white beam hit it. The pan landed near Albus. Before he could say anything else, Harry's arm was moving fast in a throwing motion, and there was a flash of something in the air. Suddenly, there was a sharp pain in his right shoulder almost causing him to drop his wand. Looking down, he saw a small kitchen knife sticking out of his shoulder. He pulled the knife out and again cast "Stupefy". This time he finally hit Harry. There was a scream as the boy fell, reminding him of the girl, whom he had forgotten about.

"Albus!" Minerva shouted at him.

"There is no time, Minerva. We must hurry. I will take Harry back to Headquarters and then go see Poppy. Will you please Obliviate the girl? She can't remember anything about us. Give her a memory of

Harry telling her he's leaving to go find his real family. That's close enough to the truth should he ever run into her years from now." Dumbledore flicked his wand at the wall and removed the scorch mark. That movement caused him to wince.

Walking over to Harry, he found the girl holding him as a mother would, trying to wake him up. "I'm truly sorry, but he must come with us."

"You're not sorry you bastard! You're the one who left him with the Dursleys and now you're taking my brother from me." Steph spit at the old man, hitting him on the leg.

"Obliviate!" he heard Minerva say. While she was doing that, he grabbed a kitchen spoon off of the counter and cast "Portus." When he touched it to Harry, the two of them left the boy's flat and arrived in the living room of Headquarters. He grimaced as his shoulder stung from the injury. He supposed he should be thankful it was a small kitchen knife and not a meat cleaver, and that the bleeding was not too bad.

Leaving Harry on the floor, he went down to kitchen. Thankfully, Molly was there and he did not have to search for her.

"Albus! What happened? You're bleeding!" She started to worry over him, coming over as if to play nurse.

"It was simply a small accident stemming from a misunderstanding. Molly, do you know the spell to help an unconscious person take a potion?" he asked her.

"Yes, why?"

"Then please find a Dreamless Sleep Potion and give it to Harry before he wakes up. I fear he will try to run away again, and I need to delay that until we can talk some more, but I need to go see Poppy at the moment," he explained.

"I, uh, well, if you think it best," she stammered.

Albus could tell she did not like this order, but she would follow it -- thankfully. "You'll find him in the living room." With those orders in place, he went to the fireplace to Floo back to the castle and get his shoulder repaired. He was not sure what he was going to do with Harry. Magic could only go so far unless he was willing to go into the Dark Arts, and he was not willing.

Minerva finished with the girl and left her asleep on her bed. There were so many things wrong about this morning she was not sure where to start, but she was sure of one thing: Harry was right, he was being kidnapped. At the moment, there was only one way she could think of to help the boy, because she knew Albus would not let her help him escape. Walking into his room, she found a cardboard box and transfigured it into a large trunk. A couple of packing spells later, it was full. Shrinking it down, she put it in her pocket and Apparated back to Headquarters. She would give it to Harry as a peace offering. Hopefully, she could think of something else soon, something that would help Harry and not put her at odds against Albus.

Harry woke with a dim light in his eyes and a snore in his ears. He blinked and looked around. There was another twin bed in his room now and Ron was loudly sleeping on it. Harry assumed the boy had been moved in to keep him from escaping again. Looking at his watch, he saw that it was nearing seven in the morning. Great, I was out for almost a full day, he thought. I wonder what they did to me?

Looking down, he saw that he was in some pyjamas that had seen better days. There were not any holes in them, but they were getting threadbare in places. As quietly as he could, he got up and left the room to go use the toilet. Coming back, he saw a large trunk at the foot of his bed.

On top were several bags with many things he did not recognize. Like why would they buy him long feathers? Another bag contained books, at least those were easily recognizable. They had titles like Standard Spells Grade 1, and four more for all the grades through five. There were various Intro books for subjects like Potions and Herbology as

well as several History books. He shook his head at the thought of having to learn all this stuff as he moved the bags to his bed.

There had also been some large black pieces of cloth in one of the bags. He assumed they were those dress things like the two professors and Molly Weasley wore, and that he would not wear. They were all idiots.

Opening his trunk quietly, he saw many things from the bedroom of his flat. If he had to guess, he would say that McGonagall woman probably did it. He wondered if she had brought his things in an attempt to be nice or just to complete the kidnapping.

He was not sure how he felt about that, as it was one more thing they had done to take him away from what he knew and thrust him into a world he knew nothing about and cared nothing for. Part of him did wonder about magic and wanted to know more, but damn it, they really needed to take some sales lessons to learn how to deal with hostile customers. Some basic psychology would be a real help to these people.

Harry stripped down to his boxers and pulled some of his clothes out. Back in a good pair of broken in jeans and a cotton polo shirt, along with his normal shoes, Harry felt a lot more normal.

With nothing else to do, and listening to snores was not his idea of fun, Harry went to the kitchen to see about breakfast. At least they did make food available. Entering the kitchen, he saw some new faces, so he stopped. His presence did not go unnoticed.

“Ah, good morning, Harry. It’s good to see you awake. I would have greeted you when I arrived last night, but you were asleep. I’m Remus Lupin, one of your parents’ school friends.” He held out his hand and Harry slowly took it and shook. His caution meter was fully pegged.

A smiling redheaded man rose and stepped over. “I’m Arthur Weasley. It’s jolly good to meet you, Harry. Say, I hear you’ve been living in the Muggle world. I’d love to talk to you about that sometime.” Harry cautiously shook his hand too and nodded.

Molly was at the stove cooking with her magic stick. No one else was in the room.

"Sirius will be down in an hour or two," Lupin told him. "He's been very excited to meet you since he heard of your return. I'm sure he'd be here now, but he's not a very early riser." Arthur chuckled with Lupin. Harry did not.

"You mean since I've been kidnapped?" Harry casually asked, wonder what reaction he would get.

"What do you mean?" Lupin asked, suddenly serious. "I was told you had been found and came here."

"Just what I said, kidnapped. You know, as in being ripped out of a life you enjoyed, taken somewhere against your will, and not allowed to go where you wish. Oh, and not told why." He stared at them, daring them to answer. Arthur seemed embarrassed and looked down at his plate, while Lupin looked at him thoughtfully, as if trying to work out a puzzle.

"Harry, I would be more than happy to discuss this with you," Lupin said sincerely, "but I believe we need to wait for Sirius. If no one has told you, he is your godfather, and as such, he is your guardian."

"Very well, I'll wait until we can talk later this morning." Harry pulled a plate towards him so he could eat breakfast too.

"Perhaps I should be there too."

Harry turned and saw Molly looking at him. "Thank you, but no thanks." He managed to keep the rejection civil, but just barely. He had not had to be around her long to figure out her personality. She was a 'yes-man' for Dumbledore.

"Harry, you need someone like me to help you understand and to take care of you."

"Molly," he said as he put his fork down just a little harder than he needed to. "I understand all I need to know for the moment. I understand I've been kidnapped and am being held prisoner in this run-down old house. I understand that you people are trying to force me to go to some school that I and the rest of the world have never heard of. I also understand that if you would let me walk out the front door, I would be perfectly fine." He poured himself a glass of milk from a pitcher, still not wanting the strange looking orange drink the others had.

"But you couldn't take care of yourself fully and they said you were living with some girl. That's not right for someone your age," she said, worriedly and a little forcefully, as if to match him.

Harry slammed his glass down, sloshing the milk out but not caring. "If you believe that, then you're as much an idiot as Dumbledore." She huffed, but he cut her off. "I was living with my sister, whom Dumbledore took me away from and me away from her, splitting the only real family I know. If you had a normal stove here, I could cook as well as you could, clean as well as you could, and in normal London with the seven million or so other normal people, I could get a better job than you could. So don't tell me I don't know how to take care of myself." He barely restrained himself from adding "bitch" onto the end of his rant. "If you'll excuse me, all the stupidity here has caused me to lose my appetite." Harry left a verbally stunned audience behind as he left the room.

Wandering for a few minutes, he found a room with a big tree on a banner that took up most of the walls of the room. There were a lot of strange names on it, as well as dates. It only took him a moment to realize it must be the family tree for the Blacks, as that was the name on most of the people.

After a while, he left there and wandered some more. This time, he stopped in a study or maybe a library. There were a number of books in bookcases, but there was also a large desk, filing cabinet, a wet bar, and a fireplace. He had just started looking around when he heard footsteps behind him. Turning, he saw Lupin and another man of about the same age with long dark hair who looked like he had just awakened and had rushed to get ready.

"Morning," the unknown man said with a hint of a smile as he walked into the room and closed the door after them. Before he turned around, he pulled his wand and waved it at the door while muttering a few words. "I'm Sirius Black and you must be Harry Potter." He held out his hand and Harry warily shook it. "I'm your godfather and your parents asked me to help you," he said with a mischievous smile, that turned sad after a few seconds. "I'm sure you're wondering where I've been and why I haven't helped you before," Harry nodded, "so I'll just confess up front that I was thrown in prison the night your parents were killed and only got out about two years ago because I escaped. Meanwhile, you've been a hard person to find. So," he drawled the word, "while I haven't been available in the past, I am here now and I understand you may need my advice and help." The mischievous smile came back. It looked as if he thought he knew all the answers.

"Did he tell you what I said?" Harry had nodded his head at Lupin.

Sirius sighed. "Yes, and looked at objectively, I have to agree with you. Alas, as the bearded Headmaster would say, there is another side to the story."

"Will you tell me?" Harry asked. "No one else will."

"I think that's entirely reasonable." He paused and looked at Lupin, who nodded. "Have you been told the tale about the night your parents were killed?"

"Yeah, they died from some mad wizard, who also tried to kill me, but some curse bounced back and killed him instead. So what?"

"Yes, so what indeed. Well, Harry, in the Wizarding world, there's dead and then there's really dead," Sirius started. "When most people die, they are really dead. But, it is possible to do some very evil magical things such that when you die, you don't pass over to the other side. Then if, and that's a big if I will say, another very evil thing is done, you can get a new body and appear to come back to life. I say appear, because in reality, you were never really dead to begin with. Understand?"

“So, what you’re saying,” Harry said slowly as he thought it through, “is that while most people die, it is possible to only appear to die but come back later.”

Sirius nodded. “Essentially. Moony?”

“Close enough,” Lupin agreed. “The details don’t really matter for this discussion.”

“So, Voldemort, he’s the guy that got your parents, did those evil things so he would not really die, and he’s recently come back to life. He’s an evil wizard and he’s thrown our world into a civil war once again. The first war was stopped when you took away his body, which made you quite famous I must say. Everyone knows your name and story, and you could use that to your advantage to pick up girls.” Sirius chuckled while Lupin shook his head. Harry was not amused.

“You’re getting off track, Padfoot,” his friend told him.

“Right you are, Moony,” Sirius said jovially, as if the conversation was of no importance. “The point of all of this, Harry, is that it appears that Dumbledore thinks you have a role in this second war with Voldemort, and wants you around to fulfill that role.”

“Appears?” Harry asked.

“Yes. You see, Dumbledore, for all of his good attributes, intentions, knowledge, etc, etc, etc,” Sirius waved his hand royally on each of the last three words, “tends to play his cards very close to the vest.”

“What Sirius is trying to tell you, Harry,” Lupin added, “is that Dumbledore does things like search for you, tell us you’re important to help us, and things like that, so that we can infer you have a role in the war, but he won’t tell us that directly and he won’t tell us what the role is. For all we know, he may think it’s your destiny to kill Voldemort, or perhaps he thinks you’re an icon for everyone to rally around.”

“He did use the word destiny with me the other day when he insisted I had to come back,” Harry commented. Sirius and Lupin looked at

each other and they both looked worried. That was the first time Sirius had had a, well, serious look, and for reasons he could not explain, that worried Harry a little.

"I've never heard him use that word before in relation to Harry," Lupin said quietly, as if this was not to be said in public or around polite people.

"Me neither," Sirius replied conspiratorily, "but if so, that would explain his obsession with Harry and why James and Lily went into hiding."

"Uh, this is helpful to understand Dumbledore's behavior, but we need to get back to the main problem. I've been kidnapped," Harry reminded them. "How can he do that and get away with it? Don't you people have laws against that sort of thing like normal people do?"

"He has a point, it is illegal to kidnap someone in our world too," Sirius said.

"True, but there are so many other laws, Dumbledore could be using one of them to claim 'protection of the Wizarding world' or something along those lines," Lupin argued.

"But would those trump the kidnapping charge?" Sirius still looked concerned.

Lupin pondered the question for a long moment. "He's Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, which gives him a lot of power and influence, as well as latitude in interpretation of the law. It's hard to say with certainty. If pressure could be brought on him, it might force him in some way, but it would still be hard to do."

"You can't help me directly?" Harry asked, concerned over how much power Dumbledore seemed to wield.

Sirius squirmed in his chair. "I can keep asking questions of Dumbledore in front of people that might be able to influence him, if everyone else went along with me and pressured him too. The problem is I'm still a fugitive since I escaped from prison. I have to be in disguise to leave this house even for a short trip. I could give

Dumbledore an ultimatum to let you go or stay out of my house. Were I to do that, he would smile, wish me a nice day, and leave. The result is that I would see almost no one except for Moony here because I'm not supposed to show my face in public or I risk death upon capture. Until Peter Pettigrew, the person who framed me for the crimes I'm accused of, is captured, I'm at Dumbledore's mercy."

"I'm almost the same way, Harry," Lupin told him. "I have a disease that, while you can't catch it unless you come near me for the one night a month it's active, and I go into hiding during that time to make it hard for people to find me, that disease is so feared I have trouble keeping a job. So if I pressure Dumbledore too much, he can make me more of a social outcast than I am now. That would prevent me from helping anyone. About all I could do then is hide in here with Padfoot."

"Shit!" Harry exclaimed.

"That would be the short version," Lupin told him with a grin.

"And spoken just like James," Sirius added with his grin returning.

"Do you have any suggestions on how I can escape his clutches, preferably forever?" Harry asked.

"Just one," Sirius said. "Change just enough to go with the flow for now. Considering how you've been, begrudgingly agree to live in the Wizarding world and learn as much magic as you can as fast as you can. You'll probably have to hide your abilities, saying you can't do something when you can. Then when you have enough knowledge and skill, leave before things get too bad. You'll probably also have to leave the country. Magic can do a lot, Harry, but there are real limits and as you come up to speed, you'll learn where those limits are and how to get around them. There are small ways we can help you with that, mostly with information."

"How positively Slytherin of you, Padfoot," Lupin said with an air of appreciation.

"Thank you, Moony, my bitch of a mother would be happy to hear you say that," Sirius said with his mischievous grin and tone firmly in place. "I think you can help by opening the Moony School of Magic. You always were the smart one, Professor."

"Good point, and he will need help to get up to speed as soon as he can, to protect himself if nothing else," Lupin agreed. "He'll be walking into a real jungle. I wonder what year they will put him in. I would imagine they will give him some tests." Lupin considered that for a moment. "We'll need some books and you'll need a wand."

"A wand?" Harry echoed. Lupin pulled his out and Harry understood. "Oh, a magic stick, I get it."

"A magic stick, I like it," Sirius said with a chuckle.

Lupin backhanded his friend on the shoulder. "Get your mind out of the gutter." He turned to Harry. "Have they taken you to get a wand yet?"

"No. They mentioned taking me shopping yesterday, but when I ran away and they had to fight me to bring me back, it sort of changed all the plans," Harry explained.

"I heard about that and thought it was a good prank," Sirius said.

"I suppose I won't see Dumbledore for a while now because of the shoulder wound?" Harry asked hopefully.

"What? No, Harry," Sirius corrected him. "He was healed and as good as new an hour after you threw the knife at him. While magic can't heal all wounds, most normal wounds are quickly healed in a few minutes or an hour at most." Harry nodded in acknowledgement. He was not filled with comfort at the thought of a healed and probably pissed off Dumbledore.

"I would guess they will take you to get a wand today, Harry. It's the twenty-eighth, so the train to Hogwarts leaves on Friday morning," Lupin reasoned. "That gives us the rest of today and then three more days to give you the basic theory and practice you need."

“So, I’ll be able to practice magic here then?”

Sirius gave him a grin. “You’re not supposed to, but technically there’s no problem. First, the rule only applies to students in school, but you haven’t officially started school yet.” Harry grinned back as the loophole helped him. “Second, they’d have to be able to detect it, and we’re under so many protective wards and charms here, the Ministry detectors can’t tell you’re doing magic.”

“I see.” Harry considered that. “In the meantime, can I use someone else’s wand so we can start working on this?”

“You can try,” Lupin told him. “We’ve always been told -- and found to be true -- that the wand chooses the wizard, so odds are, anyone else’s wand won’t work, or won’t work very well. That will make learning magic very hard on you.” He pulled his wand out and handed it to Harry. “Wave it up and down. If it works for you, you should get a fountain of sparks.”

Harry waved the wand and one red spark came out. “Better than no sparks, but not a good match I would guess.”

“And you would be right,” Sirius agreed as he handed over his wand. Harry waved it and got three white sparks. “Better, but still not really good enough. You need your own, sport.”

“Sirius, why don’t you go find out what the plan for Harry is as far as a wand, and I’ll start working with him now, giving him the basic theory. Then when he has a wand, we can do some practical work,” Lupin suggested.

“Sounds good to me. Harry?”

Harry agreed. He was not sure why he trusted them so quickly and not the others, but the first obvious answer was they were trying to help in several different ways, including his plan to escape.

“Right then, I’m on it,” Sirius said as he got up, removed his spell from the door, and left.

“Harry, I’m going to let you in on the secret to magic, something they don’t tell you until nearly the end of school.”

“That’s stupid, why wouldn’t they tell you up front like you’re doing?” Harry asked.

“I don’t know. I’ve asked myself the same question. Now the secret is that casting spells is about ninety percent intent and visualization, and ten percent is about power. That means that while there are some spells that only the most powerful wizards and witches can cast, for most spells, whether you are successful or not depends on your mental ability. For example, if you want to conjure a chair, you must be able to very clearly visualize what you plan to conjure in a detailed way, and you have to really mean it, almost like you’re showing ‘magic’ who’s boss. Watch.”

Lupin waved his wand and said, “Creo!” A wooden chair with a padded seat appeared where his wand was pointing. “That is exactly what I visualized down to the last detail. Conjuration is actually fairly hard and not normally taught until the last half of the fifth year, but this is a good example of what I’m talking about. Because of the difficulty of the visualization, most people only ever conjure one type of chair. There’s no reason you can’t make every chair different, but most people don’t want to put forth the effort to do so.”

He waved his wand and again said, “Creo!” This time, a table appeared. “As you can see, I used the same trigger word for the spell, but I got something different. The reason is that I visualized something different, and this is what I intended to make, or what I forced my magic to do. Does that make sense?”

“Yeah, I think so.” Harry said. “Does this mean that if I want to stun someone, like what Dumbledore did to me, that I have to visualize the stunning effect?”

“Yes, that’s it exactly. You must visualize what you want to do. Lumos!” The end of Lupin’s wand lit up. “I visualized a light on the end of my wand to see with. Nox!” The light went out. “Make sense?”

“So each spell has it’s own, uh...”

“Trigger?” Lupin supplied.

“Right, trigger. And I see you waving your wand differently for each spell too,” Harry observed.

“Correct. Both the word and the pattern of the wand movement help you to get the spell you desire.”

“But, Dumbledore didn’t do that. He just pointed his wand and the spell came out. He didn’t even say anything,” Harry protested.

Lupin nodded. “True, I’ve seen it. That’s experience, Harry, and he’s probably saying the word in his mind. When you have that much experience, you start to work with magic in a purer sense. There is no incantation, and there is no wand pattern. In its purest form, you would just hold out your hand and visualize what you want with lots of intent and it would happen -- almost like wishing. I’ve never seen anyone do it, but that would be the ultimate.”

“Interesting,” Harry said, deciding that he would not say a word about his abilities. He wondered if he could expand his wandless “wishing” skill beyond the few things he could do now.

The door opened and Sirius came back in. “Good news, Harry,” he told them jovially. “Dumbledore and McGonagall will be over shortly to take you to Diagon Alley and get a wand.”

Lupin took the next ten minutes or so to give an overview of the classes in magic, explaining Charms, Transfiguration, Herbology, Potions, and Defense Against the Dark Arts. He also gave a synopsis of the elective courses, although he was briefer with them as he did not think Harry would be around long enough to take them.

Dumbledore and McGonagall found the three of them in the library as Lupin was finishing his overview.

“Ah Remus, explaining about the classes, are you?” Dumbledore asked.

"Yes, I thought it would increase his interest if he actually knew what was going on around him," Lupin explained, a pleasant expression frozen on his face.

Harry appreciated the man's 'dig' at the Headmaster, even if it was subtle. While the Headmaster did not show any reaction, the woman bristled slightly. Harry was not sure if it was at Lupin or Dumbledore, as she sternly looked at both of them.

Dumbledore looked at him with his disappointing stare, as if trying to make him feel guilty. "Harry, we can not have a repeat of yesterday. You must learn to control yourself."

"The only people I've ever attacked are those who attacked me first, so you only have yourself to blame," Harry said firmly, not backing down at all.

"I'm only trying to do what's best for you."

Harry laughed. "You sure do have a funny way of showing it then. My sales manager never taught me that kidnapping was a useful technique to convince someone to let me help them and make a sale." That brought to mind that this whole problem with Dumbledore was going to get him sacked if he did not show up for work soon.

"What can I do to convince you, Harry?" Dumbledore actually looked sincere.

"Stay away from me would be first good step. I don't trust you or many around you. Despite your mistakes, a few here have made a decent impression and I'm considering what they say about living in the magical world. I may still reject it, but you would do well not prejudice me against it any more." He hoped the old man would accept that statement.

"I'll consider that." Dumbledore reached into his robes and pulled out a piece of rope. "Harry, this is a Portkey and when I activate it, it will take us to the one stop we have to go to today. Professor

McGonagall bought the rest of your supplies yesterday, but you must be present to pick out a wand.”

“How am I to pay for this?” Harry asked. “I somehow doubt they take British Pounds, as everything else seems to be different.”

“And right you are, Harry,” Dumbledore told him with his irritating grandfatherly smile. “I had the vault key for your school account, which your parents gave me. I gave it to Professor McGonagall yesterday, and she made a withdrawal to buy your supplies.”

Harry looked to her and she pulled out a small bag and handed it to him along with a small brass key. “I withdrew enough for your supplies and some extra for spending money, should you need it in the near future.” She also pulled out a slip of paper and handed it to him. “Here’s the record of the transaction so you can see what I did and how much you have left. Guard your key carefully, as anyone with it can get into your account.”

He tucked that information away. Then a question arose in his mind. “So, since you had the key,” Harry looked at Dumbledore, “did you make any withdrawals?” He thought he heard “good question” from Sirius’s direction, but he did not break eye contact with the old man.

“No, Harry, I did not,” Dumbledore replied without hesitation. “It has been sitting in a box waiting for your return. Now, if you will please take hold of the rope, we can go get your wand.”

Harry looked at Sirius, who nodded, so Harry grabbed onto the rope as did McGonagall. Dumbledore touched his wand to the rope and Harry felt a jerk from somewhere behind his navel and the world started to spin. A few seconds later, the journey ended and Harry was left lying on the ground. He noticed that the two professors had landed on their feet. That was from experience he assumed.

Standing up, Harry dusted himself off and looked around. He appeared to be inside a shop. It had lots of little boxes on shelves.

A voice from behind the professors said, “Ah, Dumbledore, you made it. And Minerva, so good to see you again.”

"Mr Ollivander," McGonagall politely returned the greeting. "This is Mr Potter and he needs a wand for school."

The bald headed old man, also in a dress, moved over so he could get a better view. "Mr Potter, a long overdue pleasure. Shall we see what we can find for you? Hmm?" He tapped his wand to a small box and a measuring tape sprung out of it and started measure various parts of Harry all by itself, while the man disappeared into the back. The two professors casually watched the bizarre event as if this was an everyday occurrence.

Harry was not sure what to think of the creepy man or his automatic measuring tape, but he tried to let it do its job. By the time the wandmaker came back, the tape finished and hopped back into a pocket in the man's work apron.

"Try this one please, Mr Potter. Dragon heartstring in ten inches of oak."

Harry took the wand and gave it a wave. A single red spark came out.

"No, no good at all." Ollivander snatched the wand from him. "This next one ..."

Harry tried wand after wand. Many did nothing; the best gave him three yellow sparks. Ollivander kept trying more.

"Perhaps a Phoenix feather one would do," Dumbledore suggested after a half hour of testing.

Ollivander looked at him for a long moment and then smiled. "Yes, I know just the one to try. He disappeared into the back again returning with a wand that he was having to wipe dust off of. "Holly and phoenix feather, eleven and a half inches."

Harry took it and gave it a wave. The wand gave a power burst and knocked a shelf over and the wind blew Harry backward onto his bum. "That would have been apropos and maybe even ironic had it worked." Ollivander took that back too. For some reason,

Dumbledore looked disappointed. Harry did his best to ignore the Headmaster.

The next wand was handled reverently. "Yew and basilisk heartstring, twelve inches. A new combination for me, sort of an experiment you might say."

Harry felt a warmth when he gripped the wand; it felt good. A wave gave a multitude of golden sparks that turned into confetti. "Yeah, I like this one," Harry said enthusiastically. "What did Remus say? Oh, right, Lumos." The end of the wand lit up brilliantly. "Nox." The light went way. "I'll take it. How much?" He stuck the wand in his right front pocket and pulled the bag of money out of his left front pocket.

"That will be twenty-seven Galleons, young man."

"The gold ones?"

"Yes, Mr Potter. Unless you'd like a wand holster for your forearm. It's five Galleons more but will be worth it for comfort and for safety. Were your wand to accidentally go off right now, I don't think you would appreciate it."

Harry had to agree with that idea considering what the end of the wand was next to as it sat in his front pocket. "Thirty-two then." He counted out the coins and closed the bag up. Magic could be cool, he decided. That bag was definitely bigger on the inside than the outside.

Ollivander handed a leather wand holster over. "Thank you, Mr Potter. Feel free to come see me if you have any trouble with the wand."

As Harry started to put the wrist holder on, Dumbledore stepped towards him. "I think I should hold onto your wand until you get to school, Harry. I wouldn't want you to get into any trouble."

"I don't think so, Dumbledore." Harry had stepped backwards to avoid the Headmaster. One strap of the holster was on his left arm, causing it to dangle while his right hand pulled his wand out and hung onto it.

“Albus,” McGonagall stepped between the two, which gave Harry the time to get the second strap on. “The wand is his and in times like these, no one goes anywhere without their wand.”

“Harry will not be in public and considering his difficulties lately, I believe it would be best if I hold onto his wand until class starts.” Ollivander looked amazed at Dumbledore’s statement.

“I think not,” McGonagall disagreed vociferously. “Either pull out the Portkey so we can return, or I shall take Harry back via the Floo in the Leaky Cauldron. I do not understand what you are trying to do, other than alienate him.”

Dumbledore looked disappointed, but pulled out the rope. Harry waited until McGonagall grabbed on before he did. He also stood as far away from Dumbledore as he could. Again Dumbledore tapped the rope with his wand they were off. A few seconds later, Harry again found himself lying down, this time on the floor of the living room of Sirius’s house. He rolled away from Dumbledore and stood up, trying to stand behind McGonagall.

“I believe you will regret this decision, Minerva,” the Headmaster told his colleague.

“What’s gotten into you, Albus? You’re not making any sense with regards to Mr Potter.” She looked like she wanted to take him to task.

Harry wondered what Dumbledore’s answer was going to be, but he was to be disappointed. The old man silently turned and walked to the fireplace, leaving in a green flash of fire without answering the question.

“Please follow me, Mr Potter, we need to talk to Remus Lupin.” McGonagall led him through the house to the library. Fortunately, the man was in there. Sirius was off somewhere else.

Lupin looked up when they came in. “Got a new wand, Harry?” he asked with a smile.

Harry pulled it out of the holster and held it up. "Dumbledore tried to take it away from me, but Professor McGonagall stood up for me and let me keep it." He looked at her. "Thank you, Professor. You've been one of the few who treat me like a real person." He watched her blink and her usually stern expression cracked to show caring for brief moment before the sternness returned.

"You're welcome, Mr Potter. All I ask is that you uphold the faith I've entrusted in you. If you abuse that trust at school, the Headmaster would be within his rights to take your wand away and give it to the teachers to give to you for use only during class. I advise you not to give him that opportunity. No matter how much you are tempted or provoked, you must never cast first. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Professor." He realized she was truly on his side; he could trust her.

"Very good." She turned to Lupin. "Remus? Will you please go over wand safety and rules of wand usage at the school. It will be difficult enough as it is without him unintentionally violating rules," she counseled.

"Of course, Minerva. Do you know what year they are going to put him in?"

"No Remus, and I can't get Albus to tell me what he plans to do. I suspect that we'll either place him in with the first years and see how he does, promoting him in the middle of the year when it makes sense. Or we'll give him some tests and use that to decide where to place him. Are you planning on tutoring him before school starts?" she asked.

"Yes."

"That will argue in favor of the tests. I'll speak to Albus about it. Good day."

"Bye, and thanks," Harry quickly told her before she could leave the room. In a rare occurrence, the Deputy Headmaster smiled fully, if briefly, before she left.

Lupin picked a book up from the table beside him. "I've been looking at your first year book, which I got off of your bed. I hope you don't mind." Harry shook his head. "Let me show you how they go and let's see what you can do." Lupin started with the light spell and they started working through the book.

Hermione was a very frustrated witch at the moment. She really wanted to talk to Harry, to see what he was like, and she also really wanted to sit in on his lessons. Even though it was knowledge she already had, she wanted to know if there were ideas she had not encountered before, but she was not allowed to. Sirius had made it very clear that Harry would be very busy with Professor Lupin and they were not to be disturbed unless the house was on fire or something equally dire. To make it all worse, Harry was allowed to do magic in the house and none of the rest of them were.

The twins were still barricaded in their room, thankfully out of the way. Ron was still being a prat and not reading the Prefect manual like he was supposed to. And Ginny had been talking her ear off about Harry, wondering dreamily what he was like -- a subject she was more than tired of discussing without talking to Harry first.

In frustration, she picked up her History of Magic book and started reading. It was her OWL year and the teacher for this class was almost no help at all.

((A/N: Note, I've purposefully brushed over a number of issues, like what happened to Hermione and the troll in her first year, the diary and Ginny in her first year, etc. Sorry, but you'll just have to use your imagination, as I don't want to make the story too long or boring by adding all of that in. Also, I'm a little lazy in not wanting to think about it all either.

Also, if you haven't figure out why Sirius and Remus are helping Harry escape, go back and read the conversation in the library again. Major reason number one is listed there. Major reason number two

(which should be fairly obvious and was hinted at in this chapter) will come out in chapters 3 and 4.)

Chapter 3

Harry finished his first day of magic lessons a very tired boy. Lupin had given him some theory, but they had spent most of the day practicing. The man reasoned that Harry could read a book anytime, but Harry only had access to a personal tutor for the next few days. Harry agreed with that idea and the result was they had worked through most of the first year successfully.

Transfiguration had been the hardest subject for him to grasp, but once he had, he conquered it quickly. It did not matter if he was transforming a needle into a matchstick or a rat into a pin cushion, as long as he visualized properly, a transfiguration was a transfiguration for him. Lupin was impressed and chalked it up to Harry being magically powerful, and a bit of his father's renowned Transfiguration skill being passed down. Harry said nothing to disabuse him of that idea.

There were two interesting outcomes for the day's lessons, one amusing and one disappointing. The amusing one was that he found he was able to pick up magic spells pretty easily, much to Lupin's surprise. Harry privately attributed that to his wandless ability and previous experience. The spells he could do wandlessly were dead easy with a wand to help focus his magic. The disappointing part was that he was going to have to give up an attempt to escape in order to have a better chance of escaping later.

He had already cooked up the idea of trying to start something with Ginny, probably something fairly innocent like snogging in a public place like the living room, and then when he thought someone was coming, he would let his hands roam a bit. If the person walking in on them was Ron or her mother, he thought he would have a good chance at an explosion big enough that they might kick him out. He strongly suspected that having the entire Weasley family against him might be enough. However, he had tested that theory with Lupin by asking if Dumbledore would cave if the Weasleys were against him (leaving out the details of how they got that way), and Lupin's opinion was Dumbledore would not cave. So he tossed that idea.

The next three days were spent learning the essential spells he would be tested on, and a few that were generally useful, like the Stunning spell and the Shielding spell. Harry learned both of those so he could defend himself better -- in "the jungle of Hogwarts", as Lupin put it.

They also spent one evening on Potions. While Lupin was not a Potions expert, he was able to explain the fundamentals and show Harry some tips and tricks on how to make Potions. Once Harry got past that theory, the work was really very easy as it was much like cooking, except for the bizarre ingredients and weird instructions. Who ever heard that it was required to stir a specific direction and a specific number of times? It was lunacy!

By dinner time on Thursday, Harry had worked through the most important spells of the first four years and he had a decent understanding, although little experience, of Potions. The subjects of Herbology, Astronomy, and History of Magic had been completely ignored.

Thursday evening was different than all the rest. They had an earlier dinner than normal, and then Molly made an announcement.

"All right, dinner is over, we adults have a meeting, so all you children run upstairs. Go on you lot," she commanded.

"What meeting?" Harry asked.

Molly glared at him, but he did not care. "None of your business, go Harry."

Harry sat there, less happy with Molly the more he was around her. He looked at Sirius.

His godfather quietly said, "This is a gathering of people who are trying to help fight the war against Voldemort. I don't think you want to be a part of this, and it's only for adults anyway. Go on upstairs and enjoy some free time. I'll come find you after we're done."

"Sirius! He's not to know anything about the Order," Molly objected.

The man ignored her. "Run along Harry. You're not in any trouble, but you can't be here for this."

Harry nodded and left, hearing Molly berate Sirius for what he had said, even though she had been the one to drop a name she probably should not have. He did not understand how Arthur put up with her. Arthur was all right, if a bit weak of a husband and obsessed with normal people, or Muggles as everyone here called them.

Up in his room, which he was still sharing with Ron, he pulled out the fifth year Defense book and started reading, trying to pick up some of the spells in it. Ron was off somewhere else, which suited Harry just fine.

Ron was an interesting character and Harry was not yet sure what to make of him. At first, Ron had been all excited to meet him, much like Ginny had. But after the first day, Ron had been mostly cool, as if he did not want anything to do with Harry. Harry did not think telling Ron he was an ass that one time was that big a deal, but perhaps it was to Ron. He had not apologized to Ron, but then he also was not that bothered whether Ron was his friend or not. If the boy could not take one pointed observation, he probably would not be much of a friend. Harry also did not plan to stay around for long, so it really did not matter in the end.

Ginny seemed to be a "fan-girl" or a "groupie" like rock stars had, or so she seemed to him. He wondered if she was one of those girls Sirius was talking about, the ones he could pick up with his fame. He wondered how many others like that there would be at school. Amy was now out of the picture, so maybe he should keep an eye out for a good girlfriend. Then again, he did not plan to be here for long, which would not be that fair to the girl. Perhaps if he kept things limited to a little snogging ... hmm, there was something to consider.

The last of the Weasleys were the twins. He had not seen much of them, as they had stayed in their room most of the time. They tended to only leave at meal times or if there was a boom from their room. They had a whacky sense of humor and that was all right with him. They left him alone and he returned the favor.

Hermione was the easiest to figure out. She was one of those type-A personalities. Her drive seemed to be centered on acquiring knowledge. Based on what Sirius told him about the Hogwarts houses, he was surprised she was in Gryffindor and was not a Ravenclaw.

From what Sirius said, it sounded like Harry should be a Slytherin, but from what Lupin said, that would be a bad idea health-wise. Harry knew he could take care of himself. He knew how to fight when it happened, but watching your back 24/7 was not his idea of fun -- especially in an unknown environment where almost everyone would know more magic than he would and they could gang up on him. No, anywhere but Slytherin seemed to be the answer.

Three hours later, Sirius had still not been up and Harry was hungry again, not having eaten much at dinner, so he went down to the kitchen. At the last set of stairs, he found Ron, Hermione, and Ginny.

"You can't go in there, Harry," Hermione said authoritatively.

"That's the only kitchen here, right?"

"Yes, but you still can't go in there. The meeting isn't over," Hermione told him as if it should have been obvious.

Harry shrugged as he did not care. It was his godfather's house and he was hungry. He was annoyed when he pulled on the door and it would not open, but Lupin had shown him how to handle this. Pulling out his wand, he did a Finite on the door and opened it. One step in and all talking ceased with everyone looking at him.

"Sorry to interrupt, but you were hogging the kitchen and I was hungry." He walked around the edge of the room for the fridge.

"Harry, this is a private meeting," Dumbledore said sternly. "You were not invited."

He opened the fridge. "I'm not trying to be in your meeting. Sirius said I should treat this house as my own and I wanted something to eat. If you didn't want other people interrupting you, then you shouldn't have

held the meeting in the only kitchen in the house. The formal dining room is big enough and would have been a much better choice.” He saw Sirius and Lupin both slap a hand over their mouth and turn red. A few others smiled, but Dumbledore looked furious. Molly frozen in shock was almost as good as Dumbledore’s expression.

“Harry, you must leave now,” Dumbledore firmly ordered. “We will be done soon and you can return then.”

He found some left over roast and vegetables and pulled them out. “Yeah, well, I’ll be done in a moment and then I won’t return for the rest of the evening.” He poured himself a glass of milk and then started to leave the thirty or so people gathered around the long table. “Good-bye, everyone,” he said as he walked out of the kitchen, the door slamming behind him and glowing blue for a second. He shrugged and turned around to go upstairs.

“I can’t believe you did that,” Hermione almost shrieked.

Ron looked stunned, much like his mother.

Ginny was another case altogether. She was in stitches rolling on the floor. All three had been sitting on the floor to begin with, but Ginny seemed to have fallen over in her mirth. That brought a smirk to Harry’s face.

“Good night.” He went upstairs to eat and continue his reading.

Soon after Ron had come up, which was almost an hour after his kitchen run, Sirius poked his head into Harry’s room and motioned him to follow. A minute later, they were down one floor and in Sirius’s bedroom. Lupin was already there. Sirius closed the door and silenced it. He motioned for Harry to take the bed and he conjured a cushiony chair for himself.

“Before I tell you some things that you really need to know, I will give you two thumbs up for your prank tonight,” Sirius congratulated him

with the hand motions. "Brilliantly done, even if it was simple. The acting was superb. I foresee a great pranking career in your future."

"I concur," Lupin said. "Your argument was logical and flawless. You made your point but didn't take it too far. I give you two thumbs up as well." Lupin did not make the hand motions of two thumbs up, but he produced a big smile.

Harry suspected they did not understand where the phrase "two thumbs up" came from, but he took it in the spirit they meant it. "Thank you very much." He gave a small bow just for fun.

"Right," Sirius continued. "Now there are a few more things that you must know before you go tomorrow. The most important is probably the staffing changes. Your Defense professor will be a woman from the Ministry of Magic who is a real work. Her name is Delores Umbridge. Harry, you want to stay clear of her as much as possible. You need to watch your back around her. There is almost nothing I would put beyond her. If you need help with her, see McGonagall, but you'll have to be very clear and detailed on what the problem is. McGonagall will ignore you if you say vague things. Understand?"

"Got it."

"And the second is the Potions professor, Severus Snape. To your good fortune, he was not here tonight, even though he is part of the group. Watch yourself around him. He hated your father and will almost certainly try to take it out on you."

"But I don't even know who my father is. He's just a name to me." Harry was indignant that he was hated for his parents who he did not even know.

"I understand," Sirius told him with compassion, "but Snape won't care. Again, avoidance is your best plan, otherwise, ignore all of his insults. He's a petty man, magically powerful and intelligent, but very petty."

"All right, I'll do my best."

“That leads us to tomorrow.” Lupin took his turn. “We’ll take the Floo to the Leaky Cauldron and then take a taxi to King’s Cross. We’ll escort you to the train, which will take you to Hogwarts. Look for a big man named Hagrid on the train platform. You literally won’t be able to miss him. He’ll take you to the castle and you’ll be sorted into a house. Sorting is very easy and painless, you just put a magical hat on your head, it looks at your personality, and selects a house for you. The next day will be Saturday, and you will take entrance tests so they can determine where to place you. Do your best but don’t worry about them.”

Harry nodded. He could do this.

Sirius leaned forward, putting his elbows on his knees and looking, well, very serious. “Harry, I want you to know that I’ve really enjoyed getting to know you this last week and I’ll be very sorry to see you go, but your happiness in being free is more important than my happiness of having you here -- assuming we all stay in Britain,” he added with a roguish grin.

Harry swallowed hard. Besides Gina and Steph, these two had quickly found a place in his heart as two of the few adults he trusted.

“I think that the best time for you to escape will be about two or three weeks into the year. At that time, they start flying classes. You should be scheduled to join them since you’ve never had them, but if not, ask your head of house to let you go too. Shrink your trunk down just before class and put it in your pocket; don’t let anyone see you do that.”

Harry nodded, committing the plan to memory.

“You’ll be outside for the class and on a broom. Play it by ear, but when the time is right, take off flying south as fast as you can go. There’s a mountain in that direction, fly over it and then head southwest. You’ll soon be over northeastern Ireland. Go south down the coast to Dublin and hide out for a few days. Fly low and try not to let anyone see you. I’ll hear about your escape and we’ll come join you. From there, who knows what we’ll do, but we think you’re more important than the war and we will help you to best of our abilities.”

“What he’s trying to say, Harry,” Lupin said, “is that we both failed you once by not watching out for you when your parents died, and we don’t plan to fail you again.”

With moisture building in his eyes, Harry got up and went over to his godfather and gave him a hug, and then he went to Lupin and gave him one too. “Thanks, guys,” he told them with much emotion in his voice. “It’s great to have someone believe me and care for me.”

“We wouldn’t have it any other way, Harry.” Sirius gave him another hug. “Now, enough of this acting like girls from all of us.” They all laughed. “Go get some sleep and be ready for anything tomorrow.”

With a smile, Harry went to his room. Ron was snoring away, so Harry pulled out his wand and cast a charm to hold the noise to that side of the room. Stripping down, he crawled into bed. It had been a hectic week and he still felt like a kidnappee, but now he had hope of truly getting away.

The next morning was chaotic, and that was putting it mildly. It started off with a shriek. Harry found out the hard way that Ginny had an incredible pair of lungs. She came in to wake him and Ron up and found that Harry’s cover had slipped down to his waist during the night leaving him “topless”. After her shriek, she went tomato-red, but Harry also noticed she did not look away or leave the room. Harry again thought that maybe he would have to see about a snog or two with her before he left England.

After Ron sent her away, Harry got ready and went to breakfast while Ron slowly got up, fumbling for his clothes as if half asleep. The Weasleys were so disorganized it was not funny. They barely left the house on time. Harry had cast a Feather-light charm on his trunk, just like Lupin had taught him; the others had not and were struggling. Magical people seemed to have no common sense, he mused.

The barrier to Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ was an interesting piece of magic, but he was disappointed with the train. He would have rather had a high-speed train rather than an old steam engine. Just before he boarded,

Lupin stopped him and quietly spoke to him so no one else could hear.

“Harry, one last bit of advice. Do not look at the Headmaster or Professor Snape in the eyes unless you absolutely have to. There is a branch of magic that allows a person to reading your current thoughts if they’re looking you in the eyes too.”

Harry was alarmed. “That could give our plan away.”

“I know, that’s why I’m telling you this. If you want to combat this, go to the library and look up a magic called Occlumency; it is the proper defense. You’ll also want to look up tracking charms. I forgot to tell you about them last night, but I’m almost certain Dumbledore has one on you. Just before you escape, you’ll want to transfer it to another person. Don’t simply remove it, he’ll catch on to the fact that you’re about to do something if you do that.”

“Thanks, Moony. This will be your best prank yet.”

Lupin chuckled as the last train whistle blew. “You’re not your father, but you’re always welcome to be a part of the Marauders. Go on, Harry, the train is about to leave.”

Harry grabbed his trunk and boarded. Luckily, he found an empty compartment and entered. Once inside, he locked the door and sealed it. Finally, he pulled the shades before he sat down. That should give him privacy for the trip. Harry decided that perhaps he should know something about Herbology for the test, so he pulled out his Herbology book for the first time and started reading.

Three times during the trip someone banged on his door to get in; he ignored them all. Once he would have sworn he heard Hermione calling him, but that did not change his mind either. When the train arrived at the station, he felt he had some understanding of Herbology, but it probably would not be good to put him in a magical greenhouse.

Unsealing his door, he pulled his trunk out after him and set it with all the other trunks. He assumed it would catch up with him. Unless it

was completely stolen, he was not too worried about it. Sirius and Moony had shown him how to protect it from others.

“Firs’ Years over ’ere!” He heard called. Turning to the sound of the voice, he understood why Lupin had said he could not miss Hagrid. The man had to be at least nine feet tall. That was not normal. Still, it was what he was told to do, so he wandered over.

“Ah, you must be ’Arry,” the big man said. “Jus’ git in a boat and you’ll be at the castle soon enough.”

Harry complied. Soon, they left the dock and crossed the lake. The castle was a real sight, he had to admit. He and the first years were handed off to Professor McGonagall, who gave him a brief wan smile. If he had blinked, he would have missed it.

A few minutes later, the Sorting ceremony began. The first years were called one by one. He got some strange looks standing with them, but he ignored them. Besides his size, he suspected people were wondering why he was the only person in Muggle clothes; but again, he did not care what they thought.

“Youngblood, Clive” was the last first year sorted before him, and he went to Ravenclaw. Then he heard his name.

“Potter, Harry.” There were a number of murmurings, but he ignored them all and strode forward. McGonagall handed him the hat and he put it on; he did not bother sitting on the stool. The hall grew quiet as everyone waited to hear the outcome.

“Well, what do we have here but an older student. You are not obvious, so where shall I put you?”

Harry did not hear the voice in his ears but in his mind, so he assumed the hat was talking to him that way. Not knowing what else to do, he “thought hard”.

“How about nowhere? I really don’t want to be here.”

“You don’t want to go to Hogwarts? Then what are you doing here?”

"I was kidnapped and forced to come here. I'd much rather go back to my old life, or what's left of it. Dumbledore has already destroyed part of it."

"Dumbledore!" the hat shouted. "I can't sort him. He doesn't want to be here."

That brought the murmurs of the students back full force, and then some.

From behind him, Harry heard, "You must sort him, he voluntarily placed you on his head."

That made Harry angry; he had been tricked. He looked over at McGonagall to see if she knew, and she looked very surprised before she shot a glare at Dumbledore. He felt a little better at seeing that, but not much.

"He has a point, that is the rule," the hat informed him. "Let's really look then. Hmm, yes, yes, you're a very well balanced person Mr Potter, but I see some very strong tendencies to do things your way and to make sure they happen. I think Slytherin would be best for you."

"If you want me kill a bunch of them, then sure. I'm told I'll have to continually watch my back, and if that's so, then some of them will eventually try something and I fight to win. I think somewhere else would be best. How about Hufflepuff?" Harry would have sworn the hat was laughing, but the sound the artifact made was hard to define. He did notice that everyone was quiet again. He just did not understand why they had such a fixation on him.

"Oh yes, your trust issues are coming into play and that would be the ultimate place to hide until you're ready for your true colors to come out. Bravo Mr Potter. You will give me many enjoyable conversations to listen to, so I shall grant your desire..."

"HUFFLEPUFF!" the hat shouted.

“Thanks!” Harry told the hat before he pulled it off and handed it to a very surprised looking McGonagall. He gave her a smile before he walked over to the table that was now cheering for him. Sitting down at the end of the table and facing the front, he saw a gobsmacked look on Dumbledore. Anything that made the old man’s life hard or surprised him was a good thing in Harry’s book.

Minerva took her seat as the Headmaster called “Tuck in” without any of his unusual words or statements. She did understand as she was in a mild case of shock herself. She turned to him and said, “Mr Potter surprised us yet again, didn’t he?”

“I don’t know what the hat was thinking,” he said in a far away voice.

She wondered what he was planning now, or what plans he was revising.

“That was quite the surprise, wasn’t it Minerva?” she heard from her left.

Turning she addressed a long time friend. “Yes it was, Pomona. I thought for sure he’d step into his parents’ house, but it looks like you will have the pleasure of his company.” Minerva really did think that Harry could do well with her. Pomona Sprout was as trustworthy as they came and Harry needed that after some of the things Albus had done to him.

“I was quite surprised to hear his name tonight. I hadn’t heard he had been found.” Sprout’s implied question could not be missed.

“Albus found him quite by accident a few days ago. For a while, it wasn’t clear if he would come or not.” She shook her head just slightly and saw Pomona’s eyes widen before she glanced past her to Albus and then nodded ever so slightly.

“There must be many questions about him, but I suppose the most important one is where to place him. I don’t see how he could be

ready for OWLs next spring along with the others of his age,” Sprout commented.

It was a safe topic and Minerva appreciated her friend’s understanding. “I believe Albus plans for us to test him tomorrow to make that determination.”

“That sounds reasonable.” Sprout looked forward to her table and saw Harry eating without talking to anyone. That was unusual in her house.

At the end of the meal, Dumbledore had a few words for everyone, and to everyone’s surprise, Delores Umbridge did too. Sprout was not happy with what she heard either. When Dumbledore released them all, she saw Harry leave with the rest of her house and started to get up herself until she felt a hand on her arm.

“Be careful with him,” she heard Minerva whisper to her. “Albus did some strange things to get him here, so he doesn’t trust easily. Support him and you won’t have any problems; cross him and you’ll have more troubles than you want to handle. Come see me sometime tomorrow.”

Sprout hurried down to the main floor and caught up to her famous student, who was at the end of the line. She would probably need to settle where he would sleep. She had seen the Malfoy boy trying to come over and there was no need for any problems of that kind tonight.

In the Hufflepuff common room, Sprout kept everyone together for a few minutes.

“Welcome everyone. It is common knowledge that the Hufflepuff name stands for loyalty and hard work. That is true and those attributes are a common thread that holds us together. But you should never forget that loyalty, trust, and hard work come in many forms, shapes, sizes, and personalities. We are one group made of many unique people, and as we enjoy our commonality, we also respect and uphold each person’s uniqueness. We bear with one

another and build with one another because we are," she pointed at her students.

"Hufflepuffs!" they shouted back, lead by the older students.

"Enjoy your weekend, you'll get your schedules on Monday morning at half seven. Be in the Great Hall then. Everyone have a good night." She smiled at them and got several waves from some returning students. "Mr Potter?" she called out.

He turned and came over.

"Mr Potter, you are obviously in a somewhat unusual situation and I would like to make you as comfortable as possible. Would you prefer to sleep in the dorm with the other fifth years, who are your age, or the first years, who are also new here?"

"I think the fifth year dorm would be better," he answered, appearing grateful that she had asked him.

"Very good, Mr Potter. We can change it later if you desire. Let's go see where they put your trunk and get you situated." She led him to the proper room.

Happily, his trunk was already in the fifth year room. She introduced him to Justin, Zach, and Ernie, who was the male fifth year prefect.

Before she left, she pulled him to the side and spoke quietly to him. "Mr Potter, part of my job is to help all of my Hufflepuffs when they have problems, so I want you to know that you can come to me for help. I also want you to know that I will do my utmost to do what's best for you, not what someone else may tell me. I may have to be creative, but I will do my best find a way to help you if you need it."

Harry looked at her and she saw him smile for the first time that evening. "Thank you, Professor. I hope not to trouble you, but one can never predict what will happen."

"No, Mr Potter, one can not; but one can look to one's friends to help," she replied, matching his formal manner. "I noticed that you are

not wearing school robes. Were you not able to get some? I can help you with that.”

“No, Professor, I believe Professor McGonagall bought me some with my other school supplies. I just refuse to wear a dress,” he told her matter-of-factly.

“They’re robes, not dresses. Dresses have a different style. Robes are worn by both genders,” she explained.

Harry shrugged. “They look like dresses to me, and I don’t plan to wear any. They look fine for you, but then you’re a woman.”

“Professor Dumbledore and all the other male teachers wear them,” she pointed out.

“I thought Dumbledore was wearing a dress the first time I saw him in one and I still think he is.” Harry refused to back down.

Sprout sighed. “You will be the only one not wearing a uniform and that will cause our house to lose points, and will cause you problems with friends.”

“I really don’t care, Professor. This is not my world and I’m only here because I was forced to be.” He dared her to contradict him.

Pomona Sprout started to understand the warning Minerva had given her. “There is an alternate uniform of trousers, a shirt and tie, and a jumper, although it is rarely worn because they look so Muggle. If I acquired some of those for you, would you wear them?”

“I would have to see them, but if they are as you describe, then yes, that would be an acceptable alternative,” he conceded.

“Very well. If you will hand me your robes, I’ll exchange them over the weekend so you can be properly attired on Monday morning.”

Harry nodded and went over to his trunk. He touched his wand to his trunk and opened it. She was impressed he could lock his trunk if he was the equivalent of a first year, since that sort of knowledge was not

learned until fifth year. She wondered who had taught him. He returned and handed her a bag of robes.

“Thank you for working with me, Mr Potter. I shall do my best for you. Tomorrow will be a busy day for you. I will see you after breakfast, as I understand we will be testing you to see where to place you, so get lots of rest. Have a good evening.”

There was something about that boy that was slightly unsettling. As Pomona Sprout went to her room, she still had a vivid memory of his green eyes, eyes that were intense and seemed to speak of knowledge beyond fifteen years. She wondered what made him that way.

Harry's first impression of his roommates was that they were acceptable. Obviously, they already had friendships based on four years together, but they were still mostly friendly to him. He showered, dressed, and went to breakfast on his own though. He planned to be there for less than a month, so he did not see the need to make friends, or at least not “best friends”.

At breakfast, he sat down by himself, but soon found others sitting around him. To his amusement, most of them were girls. That was fine with him; they were more pleasing to look at than boys. He found Hannah Abbot and Susan Bones to be the most friendly. They were polite and cheery, asking general questions but not really prying too much. He liked those two the most and made sure to smile at them. He thought he could be friends with them, and probably Ernie too. He was unsure about Justin, while Zach did not seem to fit the Hufflepuff mold as he heard the boy put others down.

Harry shared about coming from the Muggle world and how he liked it there. When he was asked why he was just now attending, he said he never got his invitation when he was eleven. He decided not to go into more detail for the moment, and thankfully, no one asked about the comment the Sorting Hat made last night.

When breakfast ended, Professors Sprout and McGonagall came over and asked him to follow them. To his eye, Sprout seemed to be looking at him differently, almost more motherly or protectively. While

there had not been much time, he considered that perhaps McGonagall had told her about the last week. He could not think of anything bad about that and it might even help him.

They led him to a large classroom. There were a few tables on the side with some plants on it as well as some equipment that looked like a chemistry station with some weird tools. All of the desks were pushed to one side, except for one in front of six chairs. He could already tell it was going to be a long day.

Professor Dumbledore was already there. After Harry and his guides entered, three other professors came in a few minutes later. Dumbledore waved him to the lone desk.

“Mr Potter, we are not quite sure where to put you. I would have simply started you with the first year classes and then promoted you as necessary based on your work, even in the middle of the year, but Professor McGonagall has informed me that Remus Lupin has been tutoring you and you should be tested to see what you have learned this last week. If you have learned enough, perhaps we can start you with the second years instead.” A man with long dark greasy hair and a hook nose snorted at that statement, but Harry did his best to ignore him.

“Each of us will test you in the subject that we teach, except for Defense Against the Dark Arts and History of Magic, where I will test you. Our Defense professor is new this year and our History professor was unable to come,” he explained. “Do you have any questions before we start?”

“No, Professor.”

“Very well, first up will be Professor Sinestra. She teaches our Astronomy classes.” Dumbledore sat down while a middle-aged witch stood up. She started asking him various questions. He could answer her on basic questions, as the information had been covered in some of his science books, but when she got to application in the Wizarding world, he had no knowledge, so she finished quickly.

"I would say he could start with the second years, Headmaster," Sinistra said.

"Excellent, thank you Professor. You may stay or leave as you desire," Dumbledore told her. The Astronomy professor left. Harry supposed she did not really care about the other subjects.

"Next up is Charms and Professor Flitwick." Dumbledore introduced a man who was barely over three feet tall. Harry wondered if he was fully human.

"Mr Potter, it's a pleasure to meet you. In addition to teaching Charms, I'm also the head of the Ravenclaws." Harry nodded to him. "Have you learned any Charm spells from Mr Lupin?"

Lupin had taught him about three dozen spells total, and they had concentrated on the ones he would find most useful. "Yes, sir. He felt they were important and did his best to teach me the most important spells from my missing four years." The greasy haired man silently sneered, as if he was sure Harry was lying. "We did not cover much theory as he said that the real proof of learning was being able to do the spells."

Flitwick nodded. "A trifle unorthodox, but not completely wrong either. Let's see what you can do. I shall name a spell or an action I want you to do, and I should like to see if you can do it." Harry nodded. "Please provide a light, as if to see in a dark room."

Harry did a Lumos spell. They continued on for the next quarter of an hour. Harry felt like he had done well over twenty spells by the time he was done with the subject. While he could not do everything the man asked, Harry had done most of them.

"Thank you, Mr Potter, most well done. You're almost as good as your mother in Charms when she was your age," Flitwick told him enthusiastically before he turned to Dumbledore. "Headmaster, Mr Potter could easily start the fourth year and probably even keep up with most fifth year students. I suspect he needs to catch up on some theory in order to do well on his OWL, but I believe he could do the work."

Flitwick ended with, "Mr Potter, I'm sorry you did not end up in Ravenclaw. If you could learn this much in a week, I would truly like to see what you could do with those in my house to help tutor you." He sat back down, so Harry assumed he wanted to see the other tests.

"Thank, Professor," Harry said sincerely. "I'm sure there are gaps in my learning as Remus said he taught me what he thought would be most useful in everyday life," which was the truth.

"Excellent work, Mr Potter," Dumbledore congratulated him. "Defense is next, but I believe I shall go last, as Headmaster's prerogative. Professor Sprout? Would you test for Herbology?"

"Yes, Headmaster. Mr Potter, please come over to these tables." She led him over to one end of the tables that had various plants on them.

Harry followed her over. It did not take long for his knowledge in this subject to be exhausted and for him to return to his chair.

Sprout gave her report. "Headmaster, I believe Mr Potter could start with the second years. A little tutoring on the basics would help him, but I believe he could skip the first year by scheduling a few weekend sessions with me."

"Excellent, thank you Professor Sprout. Harry," Dumbledore looked at him, "did you study any History of Magic?"

"No, Professor. We did not see any need to, especially considering who teaches it here. Remus said I would learn more simply by reading the textbooks and I could do that at any time."

Dumbledore frowned slightly. "I don't agree, but I have heard that opinion expressed before. Very well, let's continue on to Potions. Professor Snape, this is your subject."

Harry instantly became wary based on Lupin's warning and understood why the man had been reacting to him as he had.

“Is there really any need, Headmaster?” the greasy headed man asked in a condescending drawl. “He couldn’t have learned anything useful on his own or with Lupin.”

“We don’t know what Harry knows, so you must test him. Please begin, Professor Snape,” Dumbledore said firmly.

Snape looked like he wanted to resist, but finally stood up. “Potter, what is Monkshood used for?”

“I don’t know, Professor.”

“What are the major properties of Moonstone?”

“I don’t know, Professor.”

“What happens when you mix armadillo bile with flaxweed?”

“I don’t know, Professor because I did not study all the ingredients...”

“First year, Headmaster. He knows nothing,” Snape stated almost angry as he sat back down.

“...because I haven’t had enough time nor do I ever intend to become a Potions Master. But if you give me the directions for a potion and all the ingredients, I can make it.”

“That would be a complete waste of time and ingredients,” Snape sneered.

“Since you obviously hate me for some imaginary reason in your own mind, I suspect it would be,” Harry calmly stated, knowing full well why the man was acting the way he does.

“Why you...” Snape stared at him and Harry felt something brush his mind. Remembering Lupin’s warning too late, Harry reached for his acting skills and grabbed his head, falling to the floor with a brief shriek before some intense moaning.

“Severus!” Dumbledore shouted while Sprout jumped up and ran for Harry.

“Mr Potter, what’s wrong?” she asked. “Where does it hurt?”

“My head,” he groaned. “When he stared at me, I felt a sharp jabbing pain in my brain.”

“Professor Snape, you will leave this examination,” McGonagall commanded angrily.

“That is not your place to decide,” he coolly responded.

“As Deputy Headmaster, it is, and I can think of no reason for the Headmaster to overrule me after you have obviously attacked Mr Potter with Legilimency. There will be a meeting about this later.” Using his peripheral vision Harry could see McGonagall stand there and stare the man down. He could not see Dumbledore, but Harry found it interesting that he did not intervene. Perhaps the presence of so many witnesses prevented that. Snape must be special in someway for him to have not been sacked by now, based on what Sirius and Remus had told him about the man.

Snape growled and stormed out of the room. The palatable tension in the room immediately dropped.

“Mr Potter, do you need a break before we continue?” Sprout gently asked him, still kneeling beside him.

“A few minutes and some water would be appreciated.” Even without the attack, which did not hurt all that much because it has been so brief, he needed a break.

“Tilly!” Dumbledore’s voice called out.

A popping sound was heard and Harry saw a strange little creature with large eyes that might have stood as tall as his knees.

“Tilly, please bring refreshments. Tea for all of us except for Mr Potter, who would like some water.”

“Yes, Headmaster,” the creature squeaked and left with a pop. Less than half a minute later, she popped in again, this time with a tray that was bigger than she was. Dumbledore took it and set it down and Tilly left the room.

Harry sat and sipped his water, planning for what was left. Defense would be the hard one as he would have to face Dumbledore. How much should he show and how much should he keep hidden?

When all were finished with the break, Dumbledore showed him the instructions for a Potion from a book and Harry worked on it. They left him alone while they quietly talked, except for McGonagall, who was writing with quick and harsh sounding scratches. He almost made a mistake when he looked over, so he did his best to ignore them while he finished. When he was done, he was pleased to note that the potion was a light blue, just like the book said it should be.

“Excellent, Mr Potter.” Harry was starting to get tired of the Headmaster’s response. He knew he was not doing perfect on every test. “Professor McGonagall, I believe Transfiguration is the next to go.”

Harry checked his watch and saw there was still an hour before lunch. The morning was taking forever.

McGonagall opened a box and started pulling things out and placing them on the desk in front of him. For each item, he was asked to transfigure it into something else. At the end, she changed them all back again. She even had him try to conjure some things. The simple things like a plain wooden chair and table, he could. The more complex things like small animals, he failed at. He noted that she seemed very pleased.

“Mr Potter, I’m very impressed by your work. How do you account for you success after such a short time?” She looked patient, but Harry thought she was also very eager to know about this and him.

“Well, Remus explained that the secret to good casting was in the visualization. You asked for basic every day things, so I can do that. If

instead of the plain table you asked for, you had asked for one with lots of detail, I probably wouldn't be able to do that."

He heard Flitwick snort and then comment, "I doubt most seventh years could do that either."

"Indeed," McGonagall quietly said so only he could hear it. She turned to her supervisor. "Headmaster, based on his performance, he could easily be in my fifth year class, and with a little tutoring on conjuring, he could start in the sixth year. He has the sort of natural talent that, with some work and experience, would allow him to take over my position when I retire." She looked back at Harry for a moment and said with a softer and kinder voice, "Much like his father."

"I concur on the fifth year," Dumbledore said. "Sixth might be a stretch. Well done on your Transfigurations, Mr Potter. There is one subject left and then we can leave for lunch. Did you have a chance to study magical creatures, especially Dark creatures?"

"No, sir. Remus stayed with the practical side of Defense."

"Hmm, unfortunate as that is most of the third year, but perhaps with a lot of extra work, that could be made up," he commented as if to himself. "If you will please stand, Mr Potter, we shall have a small duel to see what you can do."

When Harry stood, Dumbledore levitated the desk out of the way. "Let's try some directed spells first. Cast a Jelly-Legs curse at me." Harry did so, and a half-dozen more as directed. Then Dumbledore had him just trying to take the Headmaster down. After several spells, Dumbledore started to fire simple spells and curses back. Harry decided to show off his shield, but pretended he did not know the Blasting and Bludgeoning curses, as well as the more severe Cutting curses. After ten minutes of work, Dumbledore called a halt. Harry was exhausted -- physically and magically.

"Excellent work, Harry, very good indeed. Why don't you go have lunch, while we discuss your results? Professor Sprout will bring you the news this afternoon."

The grandfatherly smile was back, so Harry told them, "Thank you," before quickly leaving.

He was famished and lunch had never been so good. When his new housemates had asked him how it had gone, he just told them, "Exhausting. They tested me on everything." They gave him grimaces in sympathy and a few friendly pats on the back. He was not sure, but he thought Hannah's might have been a little longer than the others. Harry did not mind, he thought she might have been the most attractive one of the bunch, although Susan was quite pleasing to look at too.

Harry was on his way to the Hufflepuff area when Professor Sprout stopped him at the door with a package in her hand, which she handed to him. "Let's go inside, Mr Potter. Your new uniform has arrived and I'm anxious to see what you think of it."

He was too, although he would not admit it. He wanted to know if they were reasonable or not. Pulling them out onto a study table, he found trousers that would have been normal in the 1940's, white button shirts, ties with gold and black stripes, and a half dozen jumpers with the Hufflepuff emblem on the breast. Three of the jumpers were a lightweight cotton for warmer weather, while the other three were a heavier wool for the winter season.

"Well, Mr Potter?"

"They're about fifty years behind the fashion curve, but otherwise acceptable," he told her.

Sprout chuckled. "You'll find many things in the Wizarding world not in fashion in the Muggle world. About your tests..."

Harry grew pensive.

"You gave us a difficult decision since your scores were spread over so many years. In the end, we decided that you can join your fifth year class in Charms, Transfiguration, and Defense Against the Dark Arts, and Potions. You'll probably struggle in some of those, but we

think you can catch up with some hard work. For Herbology, Astronomy, and History of Magic, we've decided to place you with the second year classes, and the teachers in those years will help you make up for lost time to advance quickly. If you work very hard in those, you should reach third year by Christmas. I will also make sure you have other students available to tutor you as needed. How does that sound so far?"

"There's more?" Harry asked in a slight shock, as it sounded like a lot of work already.

"Most students take at least two elective classes starting in their third year. Because you have a lot of work to make up, it was felt best to limit you to one extra class. Did Remus Lupin explain the electives to you?"

"Yes and Ancient Runes would be the one I'd pick." The idea of wards did sound fascinating to him.

"As you wish. So you can start in the third year there and with some work, perhaps you can move up to the fourth year at Christmas break, so that you are caught up in half of your classes and only a year or so behind in the other half. We think you'll be ready for half of your OWLs in June, when they are normally given, and the others will be given to you at a later time. We expect you to start all of your seventh year courses when your regular classmates do."

"Uh, wow, that sounds very aggressive." Harry had no idea if he could keep that schedule and wondered why they thought he could. Now for a little maneuvering. "What about more fun things, like Quidditch?"

Sprout chuckled. "Ah, many a young person's fancy. You may tryout for the team if you'd like. That does mean that you should attend the Introduction to Flying course that we have for first years. I'll schedule that for you. It starts in two weeks and lasts one afternoon a week for a month."

"Thank you, Professor! You've been a great help," he told her very sincerely and meant every word. He almost felt bad about making her

go through all of this work when he planned on leaving in a couple of weeks -- almost.

“My pleasure, Mr Potter; I do enjoy helping the students. I’ll let you go put your new uniforms up and have a rest. I’m sure you must be exhausted after this morning,” she told him kindly.

“I am. Oh Professor, one last question?”

“Certainly, Mr Potter.” She was like patience personified.

“Is it safe for me to assume that I’m paying for this term at school?”

“Yes. It’s a thousand Galleons a term. Professor McGonagall told me that your parents signed a contract to pay for it out of the main family vault, or so her records indicate. Why do you ask?”

Family vault? Something for him to investigate. “Since I am paying for school, then I would like to drop the Potions class.”

“Drop it?” She sounded horrified. “Whatever for? It’s a core class that everyone takes.”

“But you only have one Potions teacher, correct?”

“Yes... Oh, I see your point.” She considered that and her expression slowly turned pensive. “I’m afraid this is one place that I shall have to disappoint you. The school rules require the core classes to be taken. Still, I wonder if other arrangements might be made...”

She looked lost in thought and Harry gave her time. He had no intentions of taking a class with Snape after what happened to him earlier.

“I have an idea for an alternate teacher, but I shall have to investigate it.”

“Thank you, Professor. Please understand that I’m not trying to threaten you or anything, but I will not take a class with that man. I’ll skive class and intentionally fail before I do that. In fact, I’ll hire a

solicitor and sue for the man to be sacked for attacking a student before I take a class from him.” While completely truthful, he was curious to see her reaction to his ultimatum.

“I understand, Mr Potter, and please don’t repeat this,” a grin appeared on her, “but part of me wants to hire the solicitor for you.”

He grinned back. “Thank you, Professor, for all of your help. I can see why you are the head of Hufflepuff.” And he could. It would be a shame he would not be working with her for long.

Harry went up to his dorm room and put his uniforms away. He then pulled out some paper and a pen to write a letter. The idea of using a quill in this day and age was absurd to him. He wondered what Padfoot and Moony would say about him being in Hufflepuff. He suspected they would get a good laugh. A second letter was written to Gringotts to get some information. That evening, Ernie helped him find the Owlery. He wondered what his two advisors would say about his question.

((A/N: Chapter-wise, we're half done.))

Chapter 4

Over the next two days, Harry noticed an odd pattern. At the end of every meal, either Dumbledore or Snape was near the front door. Monday morning, he thought he had it figured out, and decided that the only way to prove it was to try to walk outside, which he had yet to do.

Seeing Dumbledore there, which seemed like the lesser of the evils, Harry made to stroll out the big front doors.

“Harry, I’m afraid I’m going to have to ask you to stay in the castle,” Dumbledore told him as he stepped into the middle of the doorway, wand in hand.

“I just wanted a breath of fresh air for a few minutes before breakfast. Is there a rule against that?” An edge crept into his voice.

“Normally, no, but for you, yes. We can not allow you to run away again. I’m sorry, Harry, but even though you have been more cooperative in coming to school, I can’t trust that you will stay here. I, another teacher, or a house-elf will make sure that you stay in the castle at all times. It is for your own protection.”

“Like in a prison?” More anger crept into Harry’s tone. “Are you ever going to tell me why you hate me so much?” He saw movement out of the corner of his eye and realized he was attracting a small crowd. Not only did he not care, he wondered if it would be helpful to his cause.

“I do not hate you, Harry, but this conversation is over. You need to eat breakfast before class.” The Headmaster tried to shoo him back in and stop what the crowd might hear.

But Harry was not done. “Or what? You’ll stun me again and kidnap me to someplace I don’t want to go like you did twice this summer?”

“Harry...”

“Don’t act like this is for my own good because I want no part of you or anything associated with you. As far as I’m concerned you’re a Dark Wizard!” Harry heard multiple gasps behind him and smirked at his success. Damage done, he turned and started walking through the crowd who was looking between him and the Headmaster.

“That will be detention for a week for disrespect, Mr Potter.”

Harry stopped and turned around. “So now I’m Mr Potter again instead of Harry. I notice you don’t call anyone else by their first name, so don’t with me either. And as for your detentions, you can shove them up your arse.” That got even more gasps. “If you don’t like it, then expel me.” He turned away and started for the Great Hall again. He could only wish to be expelled.

He passed McGonagall and Sprout on the way. They were watching too but did not say anything to him; they also had very neutral looks. He wondered how much they had heard. When he sat down, he was alone for a few minutes and started eating as fast as he could. By the time he was halfway done with breakfast, he got his first visitor.

“Was all of that really true, Harry?” Hannah Abbot asked softly as she made a plate for herself.

“Every word.” He drank some milk. He had finally tried a sip of the pumpkin juice yesterday morning and spewed, it was so gross. Zach was not happy about that as the spray had hit him, but Harry was more concerned about the unexpectedly horrible taste in his mouth at the time.

“But he’s Dumbledore... He’s the leader of the Light side...” She sounded worried.

“It’s not fun to find out that your leaders have flaws and do bad and illegal things, is it?” He was completely serious and not trying to make fun of her.

“No,” she said even more quietly and put her fork down, staring at her plate as if it might contain the answer she needed, or else she was

feeling that disgusted. He felt another presence and looked up to see Susan Bones join him. He looked back at Hannah.

"I was stunned and kidnapped twice. The second time in front of my adoptive sister, who I believe was made to forget the whole thing. He's ripped me away from the only real family and life I've ever known. Best as I can tell, he's also lied to me about things and he won't tell me why he's doing all of this. I believe he also has a tracking charm on me such that if I ever do manage to escape, he can bring me back again. And now, I find out that I can't even go outside for fresh air, just like I couldn't when he captured me." Harry took a deep breath. "It's so unfair that I hardly know what to do at times."

"Harry?" He looked over at Susan. "Laws apply to everyone. You should tell my aunt. I bet she could help you."

"Why could she help me?" He would take any help he could get.

"She's the head of the DMLE." At his puzzled look she added, "You know the Aurors, the ones who enforce the law."

Harry's eyes grew wide and a grin appeared on his face. "Brilliant, Susan, I could kiss you for that."

Susan blushed. "I won't mind," she said in a small voice.

Harry's grin grew. "How about this evening then?" She nodded.

"Can I get a kiss for telling you that there's a book in the library that can tell you how to remove the tracking charm on you?" Hannah asked with a smile.

"If you can find and check out the book, I think I can arrange a good snog." Hannah looked very pleased to hear that.

The moment was broken when Sprout came by with their schedules. She leaned down as she gave it to him. "Mr Potter, I convinced the Headmaster that I would take care of your detentions for the week. So please come by my office after dinner. Be sure to bring your

Herbology book. I think a week of tutoring will help your disrespect tremendously." She winked as she left. The two girls giggled.

"She's wonderful, isn't she?" Hannah asked rhetorically.

"A true Hufflepuff," Harry replied sincerely. "I believe Defense is first this morning. Would you two lovely ladies guide me to our class?"

"I'd be delighted," Susan told him with a big smile, an answer that was echoed by Hannah.

Harry did not fully know what to expect in Defense class, but he supposed it would be something along the lines of dueling like he did with Dumbledore. Instead, Umbridge made them read all period. She also kept looking at him as if expecting something unusual from him, although she did not say anything directly to him. So he ignored her. After class, he went to the library with Hannah.

Ten minutes later, Hannah had the mentioned book and Harry convinced her to check it out in her name, in case Dumbledore was monitoring what books he might be reading. In the common room, he, Hannah, and Susan looked the book over and learned the spell to detect tracking charms. Sure enough, he tested positive -- for three.

After lunch he had Charms and Ancient Runes. Both went well, other than the strange looks he got from the third year Slytherins in his Runes class.

The day seemed like it was going to end as poorly as it started out. On the way to dinner, a blond boy in Slytherin robes came up to him. "Potty's having to take third year courses," he laughed. "What's next? Classes with the Firsties?" He laughed some more.

"Is there an insect making noise in here?" Harry asked nobody in particular before he turned to continue on his way to the Great Hall.

He had only taken one step when he heard, "No one turns their back on me, Potty!"

Harry looked over his shoulder and saw the boy was holding his wand on Harry, so he slowly turned around and took a step closer to the blond and looked at him, tilting his head slowly back and forth as if trying to determine what he was looking at. "Or what?" Harry drawled. He snapped his hand out and slapped the boy's wrist hard before the wand could be waved, which caused his wand to go flying down the corridor and the boy to grab his own wrist as he looked at Harry in shock. "Or you'll drop your wand?" Harry asked helpfully. When the non-Slytherins who were around started to laugh, Harry backed up three steps before he turned and went to dinner. Wizards were such fools sometimes, he thought.

He joined Hannah and Susan for dinner, since they were already in the Great Hall. When the blond came in, some people started laughing at him, which made the blond angry.

"Who's he?" Harry asked, nodding his head at blond boy.

"Draco Malfoy, the self-appointed prince and scum of Slytherin," Hannah said. "Why?"

"Just wondering who tried to pull a wand on me," he said nonchalantly.

"What?" both girls turned on him.

"He insulted me and pulled his wand, so I knocked it out of his hand and insulted him back. The people out there got a good laugh out of it," Harry explained evenly, not really concerned. He had had a knife pulled on him a time or two in the past.

"I think that's worthy of another kiss," Hannah proclaimed with a smile.

"Or even two, since you put that ponce in his place," Susan agreed.

"Hey, maybe I'll do that to him again with those rewards in place," he said jokingly. The girls and Ernie, who had been listening in, laughed with him.

Part of Harry could not believe that he was in detention on the first day of school. When he first started his home-schooling, Gina had had to take away a few privileges at the beginning when he skipped some homework, but after he realized she was serious about him completing his school work if he was going to stay there, he took it seriously too and never had a problem afterwards. He was a decent student before he left the Dursleys (not counting his intentionally throwing a few tests to avoid trouble with his relatives), but Gina made him understand why he needed an education. There were plenty of examples in the apartment building they lived in, people who did not finish school. Harry could see how limited they were in jobs.

At least the detention was with Sprout and she had let him know he was not going to get punished in any serious way. He knocked on her door after dinner and she let him in.

“Please have a seat, Mr Potter. Tea?” she asked cordially.

“Yes, please.”

Sprout gave him a cup. “Mr Potter, I’ve spoken with Professor McGonagall about your summer and I understand your problem. Like her, my hands are tied if I want to keep my job, which I do as it allows me to protect my students, including you. Therefore, since I can’t help you leave, I can at least make you as comfortable as possible while you’re here.”

Harry caught an implied thought that she thought he might not be here long, but he was not sure if she really meant that or not. “Thank you, Professor, I was afraid you would be unable to do anything.”

“It’s not as much as you’d like, but I can be creative and you have more friends on staff that you might initially think. For example, Madam Pomfrey, our school nurse, has agreed to teach you Potions. So please see her in the hospital wing during your scheduled time for Potions and she will tutor you. Based on your performance on your test, I would assume that with diligent self-study plus her help where you need it, you will do fine.”

Harry nodded.

"I've also been told by the Headmaster that since you can not go outside on your own, which is completely unheard of," she added in a disgusted voice, "that I shall have to escort you to and from the greenhouses when you have Herbology class. So, please meet me in the entrance hall just before that class."

"Yes, Professor." He was still very unhappy about the situation, but at least she understood his plight and seemed to agree with him.

"Now, since you will be here for a couple hours each evening this week, let's see about catching you up with your classmates," she said with a smile.

The next two hours were spent going over the basics of the craft and making sure he knew everything a first year did. She had even brought a few plants in for them to work with. By the time they were done with his detentions and tutoring at the end of the week, she would tell him that he could join a third year class.

After his first detention, Harry barely made it into the Hufflepuff common room when he was grabbed by Susan and Hannah. He was pulled to a comfortable couch, with Susan on one side and Hannah on the other.

"Was detention bad?" Susan asked him.

"No, it was pretty easy actually," Harry answered. "Professor Sprout explained some school rules and then used the rest of the time to tutor me in Herbology. She was really understanding and great."

Hannah chuckled. "Yeah, so many people seem to think that being a Hufflepuff is a bad thing, when I think we have the best Professor for a head of house."

"McGonagall's not bad," Harry said, "but I think I like Sprout a little better for a head of house."

“Right, now on to the important stuff, Harry.” Susan moved closer so she was snuggled up against him. “You promised me a good snog as a reward, and I’m ready to collect.”

“Right here with your best friend watching?” He personally found it strange that two best friends would be going after the same guy, but maybe witches were like that. He did not really know what to expect because he had had so many surprises.

“I don’t mind,” Hannah said with a mischievous smile, “because as soon as you’re finished with her, I plan to collect my reward.”

Susan pulled his face towards her. “Now then, Harry, I’ve been thinking about this all day.” She slowly pulled his head towards her and closed her eyes.

Harry twisted some and leaned into her. Several minutes later, he had to say that while Susan did not have the experience that Amy had, she had enough. She also had enough passion to make the entire experience very enjoyable.

“I think I like being in Hufflepuff,” He said with a big grin.

Hannah started moving, so he turned to watch her scooch over to sit on his lap. Taking his face in her hands, she began to kiss him. His hands went around her waist and he enjoyed the next several minutes as much as the previous several.

When he came up for air, he said, “I was wrong, I definitely like being in Hufflepuff. It’s twice as nice as I thought it would be.” The girls groaned.

“That was bad,” Hannah told him, still in his lap.

“Very bad,” Susan agreed, despite the playful smile on her face.

Harry decided he would like to keep this, if he only could. “Ladies, if you could tell me one thing, I would be most grateful.” They both raised an eyebrow at him. “Why are you doing this? If this keeps on, I’m going to have to pick one of you one day and that’s really going to

hurt the other, and frankly, I don't want to hurt either of you." Or he would have to pick if he stayed long enough.

"Don't worry about that, Harry," Susan told him. "We'll figure something out." Hannah nodded her agreement.

Perhaps vagueness really was the best answer at the moment. "All right. Let's just be friends for a while and get to know one another. We'll just have to wait for something to work itself out. How's that?"

Hannah smiled. "I'm fine with that, as long as I can also get kisses from time to time." She pulled him in for a brief kiss to make her point.

"I can live with that," Susan said, stretching up to snag a quick kiss too.

Harry just shook his head slightly. "The situations I find myself in sometimes." They all chuckled. "As much fun as this is, I do have to get some sleep." Each girl gave him a good night kiss before he went upstairs. On his way, he saw some of the other boys staring at him, most with envious looks. He just smiled back and walked on. It was not like he had planned this.

The next day started off better, or at least it did not have a confrontation with Dumbledore. During his free time, he worked on a letter. This letter was hard to word nicely. He spent most of the period during History of Magic writing it.

At the end of class, he asked himself: Who in their right mind has a boring ghost teach history? Oh wait, he thought, the Headmaster is not in his right mind. Still, the "free" time was helpful to him.

Then he had an inspiration that took up his next free period. He was so proud of himself for thinking of it. He took care writing this letter too.

Harry stopped by the Owlery on his way to dinner to mail the letters. He watched the owls fly away with his letters, wondering what tomorrow would bring. Tonight would bring more Herbology lessons

from a very good teacher. It was a shame he would not use them much.

After detention, he worked on his essays for homework a little. He really did not care whether he did it or not, or even what grade he got, but he did need to keep up appearances. While those essays were given as little attention as possible, Harry worked very hard on the practical aspects, doing was far more important to him.

Just like the previous night, Harry got two wonderful good night kisses. It was a wonderful way to end the day.

On his way to breakfast the next morning with Susan and Hannah at his sides, Harry planned his day while making small talk. He had two very important things to do in the next couple of weeks. First, he had to practice the spells in the book Hannah had found for him; and second, he had to get a hold of a broom and fly for long enough to get a feel for one. If he was going to rocket away, he needed to be able to do that with ease.

Perhaps he could borrow Ernie's for an hour or so, since he was on the Quidditch team. No, he needed to do it in a way that no one knew he had practiced. Well, that problem would have to wait. He hoped Sirius and Remus might have an answer to that problem.

Midway through breakfast, the morning delivery owls came in. Harry had stared in wonder at them his first morning. He still found it fascinating that Wizards used owls to deliver their post -- stupid but fascinating.

An owl dropped a letter in front of Harry and then flew away. To say that he was surprised was an understatement. He picked it up and saw "Gringotts" on the back. He was impressed by their fast service. Harry did not get to read it right then because an owl had also dropped a newspaper in front of Susan and she started to gasp, which almost turned into hyperventilation.

"Susan, what's wrong?" He was patting her on the back trying to help her breathe normally.

She turned the paper towards him, not saying anything. He had to admit the headline was shocking, but then that had been his plan when the inspiration had hit.

BOY-WHO-LIVED FOUND! ONLY TO BE KIDNAPPED BY DUMBLEDORE!

Believe it or not, the Boy-Who-Lived, Harry Potter, has been found. For ten years we were told he was hidden for his safety. At the end of that time when he should have entered Hogwarts, we found out that Harry Potter had disappeared and no one knew where he really was. Now we know the true story of what happened as well as what is happening now to the young man who once defeated You-Know-Who.

We received a letter late last night from Harry Potter himself, and the information in it is astounding. It all started with the death of his parents. At that time, Chief Warlock Albus Dumbledore took him from his parents' burning house and sent him to live with his Muggle relatives, his aunt and sister of his mother. There he stayed until he was seven. Why until he was seven? Because he ran away. His Muggle relatives beat and starved him, as well as working him like a house-elf and making him live in a cupboard under the stairs in their house. That was the reward for the one-time savior of our world.

When he ran away at seven, he found a new Muggle family to live with, who raised him with love. A life he said was very happy with. All of that changed in late August.

Mr Potter says that he was walking down the street in London and accidentally bumped into an old man with a strange suit and a long white beard. After apologizing, he turned to go on his way and was knocked unconscious. When he woke up later, he was in a house. The old man he had bumped into was there and introduced himself as Albus Dumbledore. At the end of the conversation, Dumbledore said that Potter had to stay and could not leave. He had been kidnapped!

While Mr Potter managed to escape once, he says that Dumbledore managed to track him down in a matter of hours and stunned him to take him back to Dumbledore's safe house. While Potter says he was

fed, he had very few freedoms for the week he was there, which included being guarded by over half a dozen adults in some sort of Order who knew he had been kidnapped and did nothing.

Where is he now? Mr Potter says that on the first of September, he was forced onto the Hogwarts Express and made to attend Hogwarts, where Dumbledore is Headmaster and can keep an eye on him. But is it a safe place for Mr Potter? Apparently not. During some entrance tests, he was attacked mentally by the Potions professor, Severus Snape, whom many know was a 'pardoned' Death Eater of the first war with You-Know-Who. Interestingly, while the attack with Legilimency on Mr Potter was witness by the Headmaster and three other teachers, Mr Snape is still a teacher two days later. In addition, while Mr Potter does attend classes, he is not allowed to go outside for any reason, not even just for a breath of fresh air. The school has become his new prison, just as Dumbledore's safe house was.

Why has Potter not been freed? In his words, he's at a severe disadvantage because he does not know very much magic and knows little of our world, although he would be willing to learn if he was given the choice and not forced into it. He also says that a few people have been sympathetic to his imprisonment, however, those people can not help him because they are in a position that allows Dumbledore to blackmail them with threat of sacking, or by threat of bringing them up on various legal charges.

We at the Daily Prophet find this story shocking and we promise to follow up on it.

For a copy of the actual letter from Harry Potter, see Pg 4.

For analysis of the letter, see Pg 4.

For the Ministry's statement on this, see Pg 5.

For a history of past problems that have plagued Hogwarts recently, see Pg 6-7.

A glance at the Head table showed a very angry Dumbledore. Harry was very pleased at that sight. Now that Dumbledore was in a place he did not want to be, maybe he would be more understanding of how Harry felt. Sadly, Harry doubted that would happen.

“That’s what happened to you?” Susan asked, as if she could not believe it.

“Minus some details, yes,” he replied as he finished up his breakfast.

“My aunt is going to want to talk to you,” she told him.

“I would welcome the conversation,” Harry told her with a grin. “I think it would be most interesting.”

“As long as you’re not Dumbledore,” Hannah said with chagrin. “He is not going to be happy with you.”

“That’s all right, I’m not happy with him.” Harry shrugged. “What I find even more interesting is that the newspaper printed my letter without ever verifying anything with me. That really makes me wonder how many things in it are there because someone felt like writing an opinion as news.”

“According to my aunt, more than you would first believe,” Susan told him, shaking her head. “But maybe this will help you. Oh well, time for class.”

Harry got up to go to his Ancient Runes class. After that and before lunch, he would meet the school nurse for his first Potions class. While the afternoon was supposed to be his Transfiguration class, he wondered if he would make it.

As it happened, Harry did not make it to class that afternoon. On his way through the Entrance Hall after lunch, an older woman and four men, all in deep red robes, walked in the front door.

From beside him, he heard Susan squeal “Aunt Amelia!” and go running over to her. The two hugged briefly. He and Hannah looked at each other and smiled. Neither walked on, knowing they would just get called back if they did.

A moment later, Susan brought the new group over. "Everyone, this is my Aunt Amelia, who is the Director of Magical Law Enforcement. Auntie, you know my best friend Hannah and this is my new friend Harry Potter."

"Director Bones," Hannah said deferentially and bowed her head.

"Miss Abbott, it's good to see you again," Amelia Bones smiled and said with a deep voice for a woman.

Harry held out his hand, "Director Bones."

Her smile increased as she shook Harry's hand. "Mr Potter, you're just the person I was coming to see. Would you please join me in a room for some conversation?"

"Of course, I'd be happy to," Harry agreed, sounding delighted.

"Susan, why don't you and Hannah go on to class? I'll take good care of him for you," Amelia told them with a knowing smile, which caused each of the girls to blush slightly. They told him good-bye and Amelia led him into a nearby classroom that was unused. She looked inside for a moment before pronouncing it good. Two of the Aurors were told to guard the door, so they waited in the hall while the other two Aurors entered the room and the door was closed.

One of the men opened up what looked like a small sack and pulled out a long roll of parchment and a fire colored quill. He put the quill over the parchment and touched his wand to it. The quill stood on its own. Then he also pulled a small stone bowl out of the sack and placed it on a nearby desk, before he stepped back.

"Mr Potter, I was greatly surprised by your letter, as well as greatly saddened by what you wrote in it. I don't believe anyone should have to go through what you did. So if you will consent to an interview, one that will be recorded for legal purposes, I will try to help you. The law is on your side and I can't think of any drawbacks for you speaking to me, other than missing a little class time. Do you consent to this?"

Harry noticed that the quill was busily scratching on the parchment.

"It is a certified legal dictation quill, guaranteed to write everything said, nothing more and nothing less. Feel free to look at it, but I will need your verbal consent before we continue," she explained.

Harry stood and looked at the magical device and what had been written. It was as she said. "I agree to the interview," he said, watching it write his words before he sat back down, "and I promise to tell the truth as I know it."

Bones smiled. "Very good, Mr Potter. While I have your letter, for the quill, please tell me about all of your encounters with Albus Dumbledore since you met him." She pulled out a small notepad and quill for her own notes as Harry began.

He spent the next hour or so describing the last two weeks of his life, almost every detail that he thought would matter, even his godfather's story about being framed by his old friend. She did not interrupt him once.

After he was done, she started asking questions, including if he knew where he had been held during the summer.

"Oh yes, I'm sorry I left that part out. When I escaped that one time, while the house disappeared on its own behind me, it was obvious that the house should have been between #11 and #13, and the street sign said 'Grimmauld Place', so I believe I was being held..." the door suddenly opened and there was Dumbledore, "...at #12 Grimmauld Place in London," he finished quietly.

The two Aurors in the room instantly drew their wands at the intrusion. The two Aurors outside suddenly became visible with their wands drawn as well. Harry guessed the old man had done something to sneak by them and open the door before he could be stopped.

Dumbledore looked very pale. "Harry, you aren't supposed to ever speak that address." He said it as if shocked that a state secret had come out.

Bones immediately stood and quite forcefully said, "Headmaster, you were not invited to this interview and I shall have to ask you to leave and wait your turn. I have questions for you to answer as well, but Mr Potter has not finished."

"This is my school," Dumbledore recovered his normal 'in charge' manner.

"And I'm borrowing one room as a convenience to Mr Potter. I have the authority and jurisdiction to escort him to the Ministry for this and then bring him back, but I thought this would be more comfortable for him. Now, I suggest you conjure a chair and wait outside until I'm done here. Do not attempt to leave or I shall have to issue a warrant for your arrest for obstruction of justice."

"But I'm the Chief Warlock..."

Bone interrupted him. "Who has been placed on suspension pending the outcome of this investigation. Please have a seat outside and I shall be with you soon."

Dumbledore ignored Harry and continued to stare at Bones. She held it and returned a glare. Apparently she won the staring contest as Dumbledore turned and left the room; an Auror closed the door again.

"I'm sorry, Mr Potter. We are almost done though. This other device," she pointed to the stone bowl with little carvings on them, "is called a Pensieve. I can help you pull a copy of a memory from your head and it can be placed in here for others to view, just as if we had been there too."

"Now that is cool..." Magic did have its advantages, Harry thought.

Bones gave him a big smile at his enthusiasm. "It is cool and very helpful to us when investigating. This is also a Legal Pensieve, so it will store the memory and prevent it from being tampered with. I can assure you, Mr Potter, that this will neither hurt nor will you lose the memory, as I will only take a copy of it. Will you agree to give me a copy of the memories for the events we have discussed today?"

"Sure if it will help you. How does it work?" he asked cuiously.

"First, I want you think very carefully of the memory of the first time you met the Headmaster outside of the Leaky Cauldron, from just before you ran into him until you went unconscious. Please do that now."

He tried to actively think of it. "OK."

She put her wand to his temple and murmured a word, and Harry felt a small tingling in his head. A moment later, he saw her drop a silvery, wispy mass that was on the end of her wand into the bowl. "Now, let's watch it, shall we?" She tapped the bowl with her wand and the scene was projected above the bowl. A moment later, the scene ended. "Excellent, Mr Potter. Now we just need to do that for the others too."

The next five minutes were spent extracting memories. When she asked if there were any more, Harry hesitated.

"Is there a problem, Mr Potter?" she asked with concern.

"Well, there are a couple more I'd like to give you, as I think they would help you, but I don't want to get anyone into trouble, although two of them may have already done that." He looked down, not facing her.

Bones gave him a sympathetic look. "I understand, Mr Potter. If those people are truly innocent, then they will have no problem."

"But in a way, they're not. They did not come to you to protest my kidnapping, and yet, they did try to help me where they could. I know in the Muggle world that sometimes the solicitors work deals for their client to receive only a small fine instead of big fines or jail time in exchange for information and help. Could you do that here?"

Bones thought about that. "You're concerned for Professor McGonagall, aren't you?"

He nodded. "Professor Sprout and Remus Lupin too. I think all three of them were under a lot of pressure not to say anything."

"Ah, the blackmail you mentioned. Yes, I can see that." She considered that. "I believe I can make that promise. I suspect they will not even be fined, but I can keep it small if a ruling is made against them."

"And Sirius Black, will you promise a fair trial for him? And use that truth potion he told me about?"

Bones smiled again. "I can promise you that. I will cancel the 'bring in dead or alive' order so he is captured instead."

"That's good, because from what I understand, you really have no proof that he did anything wrong," he told her seriously.

"But he betrayed your parents and got them killed; everyone knows that," she told him.

"That is the common belief, but could you prove that? Do you have any records of his being the secret keeper or is it all just rumor?" he pushed her.

She closed her mouth and thought about that, then chuckled. "You're correct, it's just hearsay as recording who the Secret Keeper was would defeat it's purpose. But we do know he killed Peter Pettigrew and twelve Muggles. People saw him do it."

"People saw him cast a spell, which he says was a Stunning spell. Lupin tells me a Stunning spell can not cause an explosion," he confidently told her.

"If you believe it was a stunning spell," she said hesitantly.

"But everyone forgets there were two wizards there. What if the other wizard cast the explosive spell and covered it up?" She had no answer for that. "And Lupin also told me that you can test a wand for the spells that were recently cast. Was that done for Sirius's wand?" he asked.

Bones shook her head. "Damn fine questions, Mr Potter. I don't know the answer to your questions, but I can find out. I do know that his wand no longer exists though."

"So unless the report says that his wand was tested and shown to have done a Blasting hex, then you have no proof of a crime for that either; or at least he should be able to cast a lot of doubt on his guilt."

"And you think that with the lack of hard evidence and Veritaserum to show that his words were true would set him free?" she concluded for him.

"It seems logical," he agreed.

"I agree, but logic does not always carry the day, especially with our current Minister," she said and looked as if she did not like admitting that. "Nevertheless, I will promise him as fair a trial as I can arrange," she told him.

Harry smiled and told her, "Thanks! Then I have three more memories for you, and you may want to watch two of them now."

Bones pulled a memory out of him and put it in the bowl. She carefully watched the memory of the conversation between him, Sirius, and Remus where they discussed why Dumbledore had kidnapped him. "Yes, very interesting and it gives me an idea." She made a note on her little pad.

The next memory showed the meeting in the kitchen that he had interrupted and Bones came out of her chair and paused the memory, after she had said some very unladylike words. "That's Shacklebolt!" she exclaimed. "He's supposed to be tracking down Black, but there he's sitting across the table from Black and doing nothing. And so are Tonks and Jones." She slumped into her chair. "So this is the famous Order of the Phoenix," she commented.

"Most of it," Harry added. "I was told that Severus Snape and a few others were not present."

“But there are three Aurors and a department head, along with the Chief Warlock, all with an escaped man we’ve been searching for.” She waved a hand to stop him when he started to talk. “Oh I know they thought him innocent, but they could have started the process you’re doing back when he first escaped. Even more damning, because Black may be innocent, is that they did nothing to help you, a victim of a major crime. They will almost certainly be charged with being an accessory to the kidnapping.” She shook her head at the injustice of it. “You said there was a third?”

“Yeah, I thought you’d like to see Sirius explain what happened when he confronted Pettigrew, you know, in his own words.”

“That might be useful. If you would please think of that one?” She helped him pull that memory. “Unless you have anything else to tell me, I think we’re done for now.”

“No ma’am.”

“Thank you very much for the information, Mr Potter. I believe you will be a much freer man in a week or two. While I would hope that you stay in the Wizarding world, I would understand if you did not. You’re experience has not been pleasant,” she told him with sympathy.

“Thank you for your help. I do appreciate it. The strange thing, Director, is that if he had just tried to tell me about things, simple meetings over time, you know, slowly introduced this new world to me, my curiosity probably would have made me live here for a couple of years to check it out. Despite how wonderful a few people here have been,” he glanced down briefly when he said, “like your niece and Hannah, I don’t know that I have much of a reason to stay.”

“I mean,” he went on, “most of the people in Hufflepuff are great, as are most of the teachers here; but the Wizarding world as a whole just seems backward, corrupt, and -- well -- wrong.” He shrugged, not sure how else to explain it.

Bones put her hand on his shoulder. “I’m sure it does look that way to an outsider. The Potter family is an old family, and I’d like to see it return and take its rightful place. However, I can see where you don’t

see that as positive as I would. All I do ask is that you give it full consideration,” she said with a caring but pleading look.

“That’s a reasonable request, and I probably will stay long enough to find my place, but I doubt I will spend much time here in the foreseeable future. I just can’t trust Dumbledore,” he admitted.

“I understand, Mr Potter. Let me walk you out and you can enjoy what little of your afternoon is left before dinner. I need to speak with Dumbledore and a few others while I’m here.”

She led him to the corridor, and Dumbledore was sitting there in a chair. Harry did his best to ignore the man as he walked by him to his dorm room.

He lay on his bed and thought about his plan to escape. She said he would be free to leave soon. Perhaps that was better than his escape, even though flying away would have been much more satisfying.

Suddenly remembering his letter from Gringotts, Harry pulled it out and read it. While inconvenient, he was not surprised that it said that he must show up in person or provide a letter of authorization with his key to prove who he was before they would give out that information. He would have expected the same from a Muggle bank. This was one more reason to get away from the school, even if for only a little while.

Harry was having dinner, with “his girls” sitting on either side of him; his dorm mates were across from him. While they were discussing the upcoming Quidditch games for the season, Harry listened and snuck glances at the head table.

Dumbledore was wearing a sour expression and Harry was pleased at that. Professors McGonagall and Sprout were quietly talking, and when Sprout saw him looking, she gave him a brief smile. Most curious was that Snape was gone, though he had been there during lunch; it was very puzzling.

As dinner neared completion, Director Bones and her four Aurors came into the Great Hall. Amelia sat down next to Susan, while the Aurors sat at the end of the Hufflepuff table near the door.

The Director greeted everyone and Susan introduced her to all of her friends.

"Auntie, did you find everything here that you were looking for?" Susan asked.

"Mostly, although I still have some interesting things to investigate." She gave a glance at Harry.

"Director Bones?" Harry asked. "I notice that Snape is not here tonight. Would you know why?"

"Actually, I would," she said after she swallowed. "He's presently sitting in a holding cell at the Ministry." All the students who were listening gasped. "I believe that you will find most of your classes canceled two Fridays from now, as that is when his trial is scheduled to be held."

"What do you think will happen, Director?" Harry had to know, even if he was not going to be here.

"It's become a very interesting case. After your letter was published, we've started receiving more owls from former students who are making the same claim. Based on that, I'd say there's a good chance the Headmaster will need to find another Potions teacher." Then she added with a smile and a wink, "Or that's the way I'd bet." That got a few chuckles.

The Director hurriedly finished her meal and then looked at him. "Mr Potter, may I speak with you for a moment before I go?"

He nodded and then got up to follow her back to the room they had used earlier.

"Mr Potter, I stand by my statement that you will soon be free, however, I must amend my intention. I had thought you would be free

to do whatever you wanted as soon as we cleared this mess up. However,” Harry felt his anger started to build as she said that word, “after talking with the Headmaster, who is also the Chief Warlock, I’m afraid that you will have to stay in school.”

“What?!” He was ready to go punch an old man out and damn the consequences. He clenched and unclenched his fists as he tried to let his anger bleed off.

“Please, remain calm, Mr Potter, it’s not as bad as it first sounds,” she tried to placate him.

“Oh?” he asked sarcastically.

“I understand your frustration, but please let me explain. Unbeknownst to me, the Chief Warlock got a law passed just before school started that stated that every magical child who has started a magical school, must stay in a magical school until the normal courses have been completed.”

“But, but that means I would have to be here for three years!” He still wanted to go punch someone.

“Ah, and there you are not quite correct,” she said with an impish grin. “You see, he stated the law to me like you did, but I looked it up just before dinner. Please notice that we used different words, and in laws, words are very important,” she admonished him, staring at him. When he said nothing for a moment, she asked, “What exactly did I say the law required?”

“Once I’ve started school, I have to stay in school, until my courses are completed,” he told her.

“Close enough. Do you not see the loophole he inadvertently left for you to take advantage of?” Bones looked at him expectantly.

Harry thought hard about it. “I have to stay in school,” he muttered. Then it hit him and he quickly looked up at her with hope on his face. “It doesn’t say which school, does it?”

She beamed at him. "Very well done! Professor Flitwick said you would have made a good Ravenclaw. Now, if you find you can't stand to be here, then I would suggest you get a hold of your guardian very discretely and have him find another school and quietly do a transfer."

"Even in the middle of a year?" He asked, hardly believing what she was suggesting.

"The choice is up to you and depends on how much you want to stay here versus how much you want to leave." She paused for a moment. "I'm sure my niece will dislike me for a few weeks for saying this, but fame does have its uses. It's a tool to be used like any other...carefully mind you, but there's nothing illegal about it."

"Thanks, Director!" He really meant it too.

"I'm happy to help a fellow Hufflepuff. Also, Mr Potter, it's still early in the year, so I doubt most schools would have a problem accepting a new student during September," she told him with a wink. "On the other hand, you should not rush to do this either, because it's quite possible that Albus Dumbledore will no longer be the Headmaster here once all of his charges have worked through the court system. I can't give you a date nor promise you his trial's outcome, but you need to balance your needs and your desires."

Harry nodded as he listened. "I see, so some patience and endurance on my part might allow me to stay at the best magical school in England and keep my new friends, assuming I get lucky and someone else has to leave."

"I'm glad to see that you're looking at the big picture, Mr Potter," she said with a smile. "On to the main reason for my being here," Bones's tone became very serious. "You should know that while I can't arrest him because of who he is and the power he wields, I have told him not to leave Hogwarts. That is, he should consider himself under house arrest. He will almost certainly also have a trial, but it may take a month or so to get there."

"Almost certainly?"

"I won't lie to you, Mr Potter. Albus Dumbledore carries a lot of power -- political power, and he has a very good reputation to bolster himself with. Fortunately, he's not in the best of positions at the moment, claiming that You-Know-Who is back when there is no evidence of it, but Dumbledore is not one to be dismissed lightly. Therefore, it will take longer to build a case against him."

"I see," Harry said, and he did. "He'll probably try a plea bargain saying that he was doing it all for the greater good, won't he?"

"Yes, I see you do understand. However," she fixed him with a stare, "whatever happens, he will not be able to keep you prisoner anywhere. You will be treated like a normal person soon, that I can guarantee."

"At least there's that."

"Yes there is," she agreed. "He is also required not to harass you before his trial. If he should do so, please send word to me," she told him.

"Thank you, Director, that would be helpful too," he acknowledged gratefully.

"I'm glad I could help, Mr Potter. Now if you'll excuse me, I still have things to do before I can call it a day." She smiled at him, but it was obvious that she was tired and would have preferred to go home.

"Thanks again, Director! I really appreciate your valuable time." Harry was quite pleased and he hurried off.

In the common room, he sat with his friends and did a little homework. He did not work as hard as the others, but he was fine with that. When the three of them had finished all of their homework for the next day, Harry dragged the two girls over to an unoccupied corner. There, he pulled out the book Hannah had checked out from the library.

It took four tries, but Harry finally got the hang of casting the tracking charm on Susan and on using the tracking portion. Three more tries

later, he had figured out how to move the tracking charm to Hannah, and when he tested the tracking feature, his wand now pointed to Hannah instead of Susan.

Satisfied he knew what he was doing, he removed the charm from Hannah and gave the book back to her. "Thanks!" he told her as he pulled her in for a good snog.

When he released her a couple of minutes later, Susan pulled him to her. "I think I should get a reward for helping you with those spells too," she said mischievously. Harry was only too happy to comply. It was really going to be hard to leave this, he thought.

The fallout from Harry's letter continued throughout the rest of the week. The most obvious change to the students was that Potions class no longer had a lab. The students still had to go, but they had random teachers sitting in and telling the students to read their Potions book.

To Harry, the biggest change was that Dumbledore kept his distance. He watched Harry closely, but the man left him alone most of the time. Harry was happier with his situation.

The next surprise for Harry came on the Sunday afternoon after the end of the first week of classes. As he was finishing lunch, a visitor appeared in the doorway of the Great Hall. The murmuring and pointing clued Harry in that something unusual was happening. When he looked up, he saw Remus Lupin. "One of my guardians, I'll find you later," Harry told the girls with a big smile as he jumped up and hurried out. He had taken a quick glance at the head table and Dumbledore did not look pleased, but he left them alone. As Harry neared his father's old friend, he also saw a big black dog. He had no idea why Lupin had brought a dog, but he was not going to worry about it at the moment.

"Remus!" he gave the man a hug, who returned it as well as patted him on the back. "This is an unexpected surprise."

"Harry, why don't we go somewhere to talk, away from prying eyes?"

Harry saw Lupin glance at the head table. "Sure, follow me." Harry led him off to an unused classroom, the dog following behind.

When Harry started to enter one, Lupin put his hand on his shoulder to hold him back. Harry started to ask what he was doing, but Lupin stopped him with a finger to his lips. Looking in and around the room, Lupin shook his head and closed the door. "Find another," he said quietly, "that one has portraits in it and they can listen in and report back to the Headmaster."

That scared Harry, as he wondered what secrets of his were no longer secrets. The worst ones would have been with Director Bones, so he went to that room, hoping there were no portraits in there. Looking in, he was relieved to find the walls bare. He wondered if she had picked the room on purpose. Lupin closed the door after them and cast several privacy charms as well as one more Harry did not recognize, one that made Lupin wave his wand in a circle.

"What was that last one?"

Lupin smiled. "It is a very special spell that will cause people who are under invisibility cloaks or invisibility spells to briefly show up. Fortunately, it looks like we're clean. Padfoot?" The dog morphed into Sirius, which scared the daylights out of Harry for a moment.

"What the..." he shouted. "Damn it! Don't do that to me." He took a few deep breaths to try to calm his racing heart.

"Do what?" Sirius drawled as he pulled Harry into a hug.

Harry looked at Lupin. "Can you do that too?"

"Me? No." Lupin looked a little sad, or maybe resigned, so Harry did not press the issue.

"So, Hufflepuff, huh?" Sirius asked. "Got any loyal followers yet?" he asked with a wiggling eyebrow.

"Do two fifth year girls count?" Harry smirked back, more than willing to play the game.

Sirius's eyes went a little wider and he looked at Remus. "I do believe he's learning. Way to go, Harry!" He slapped the boy on the shoulder.

"Uh, thanks." Harry rubbed his shoulder.

"We see you're having fun with Dumbledore, Harry. Has he been treating you all right since the article came out?" Remus asked him.

"Well, if looks could kill, I'd be dead a few times, but otherwise, he's mostly left me alone. Director Bones told him to and so far he has," Harry said with a small smile.

Sirius nodded. "He seems to be nicely distracted at the moment. So what about our plan?"

"Still on track. Speaking of which, I have several tracking spells on me, but Hannah found a book in the library that explains them, and I know how to move them to another person. I know Director Bones said I should be freer in a week or two, but I still think I'll leave in my Intro Flying class this coming Wednesday. Are you going to be ready by then?"

Lupin nodded. "I believe we have everything we need now, except for packing. We'll do that the night before. That should be fairly easy now since we mostly have the house to ourselves."

"I'll say," Sirius agreed.

"Why? Did you tell Dumbledore to take a hike?" Harry wondered.

"Take a hike?" Sirius asked.

"Meaning to leave, you idiot," Remus explained to his friend. "To answer your question, no. But after your article, the group that meets there..."

"The Order?" Harry asked.

“Yeah, the group we’re not supposed to name in front of you,” Remus smiled, “has been in a tizzy. All the Aurors in the group have been written up and put on desk duty until a hearing can be called. Several of the others that work in the Ministry have been sacked. Oh, watch out for the Weasley children. Their father was sacked and they don’t have a lot of money, so they might try to blame you.”

Harry rolled his eyes and snorted. “Mr Weasley seemed like a nice guy, but I could tell he knew what was being done to me was wrong. It’s his own fault.” He briefly wondered how the new law about students staying in school would affect the red-haired family, but it really was not any of his business.

“Legally, you’re correct,” Sirius agreed, “but emotions don’t always think correctly. I don’t know if the kids can stay here in school or not as the family doesn’t have much money, so be careful around them.”

“Sure,” Harry readily agreed. He always tried to watch his back. “Any changes to the plan?”

“Just two, and I think you’ll like both of them,” Sirius said with an evil grin as he pulled some parchment out of his pocket. “I need you to sign this. Dumbledore will get a copy on Monday morning.”

Harry looked it over and then started to laugh. “He’s going to be pissed off.” Sirius handed him a quill and Harry signed the document.

“Probably,” Sirius said without an ounce of regret. “My thought was that it would keep him distracted and looking in a different direction. If he gives you any grief over it, send him to me and remind him of what the law says. You can also remind him that Amelia Bones can return for more interviews.”

Lupin was not laughing, but his expression showed him to be enjoying the conversation. “Give him your gift, Padfoot.”

“Ah, yes, the other item.” Sirius pulled out a stick about half the size of most wands with a small knob on one end and handed it to Harry. “Pull out your wand and cast the Finite spell on it.”

Harry did and the stick expanded greatly so that Harry was now holding a full-sized broom. "Whoa!"

"That, my boy, is a top of the line Firebolt and the fastest racing broom on the market. It would do reasonably well in Quidditch, but for distance racing, there's none better," Sirius said proudly. "Go ahead Harry, mount it and sit on it. Just don't try to push off."

He broke out of his amazed stupor and threw one leg over it. As he sat on it, he could feel it become active and push up under him. It was surprisingly comfortable. "It feels like there's a seat on it."

"There is, you can't see it, but it's there. There are a lot of charms on it, but the most important ones are the control mechanism. Put both hands on the stick right in front of you and comfortably sit there, it should hover," Sirius instructed him.

Harry did so and pulled his feet up. He was actually hovering. "This is really cool," he said excitedly. "I'm really flying."

"Now, very slowly and carefully," Lupin said, taking over the lesson, "lean forward and it will go forward. Pull up very slightly and it will go up. Push down to descend. Use the smallest movement you can since we're indoors."

Harry did so, with very slight movements causing the broom to start flying through the room. It was going slow, but he was flying and it felt incredible! "How do I stop this thing?"

"Pull your hands back on the handle so they are close to your body and you can sit up. Conversely," Sirius told him, "pushing your hands out and leaning over the handle will make you go faster. Leaning to the side will allow you to turn."

Harry slowly flew around for a few more minutes before he landed. "That. Was. Cool!"

Lupin pulled out his wand and tapped his wand on the broom and shrunk it back down. "Keep that in a safe place until you're ready to

go. Get used to real flying on the school broom in your class, then you can pull this out, expand it, and leave when the time is right.”

“With my shrunken trunk in my pocket,” Harry completed the thought.

“Correct. Do you remember the shrinking charm that I taught you?” Lupin praised him with a smile when Harry nodded. “Any last questions? We shouldn’t stay too long.”

“How will I find you? Or will you find me?” Harry asked.

“We’ll be on the coast and watching for you, signaling when you fly by. Please try not to be spotted by any Muggles. The magical Ministries really don’t like having to make people forget things,” Lupin explained.

“Right. Got it. Oh, I just remembered. Sirius, can you get to Gringotts before we leave?”

“Sure, why?”

Harry fished in a pocket and pulled out a little key and a letter. “Take this key and my letter of authorization with you and ask them for statements and restrictions on all Potter accounts. There should be at least two accounts. And find out who can access them. If Dumbledore is on any of them, do your best to remove him. Oh, and remove any authorizations to Hogwarts too.”

“Easy enough,” Sirius said with a smile. He stepped forward and gave Harry a hug. “Take care, and we’ll see you Wednesday evening. Be sure you get a good snog from your followers before you leave too,” the man teased.

“Of course,” Harry stepped back and gave Lupin a hug too. “Thanks to both of you for believing me and for helping me.”

“We wouldn’t have it any other way,” Sirius said just before he morphed back into the big black dog.

“Take care and be very careful, Harry.” Lupin opened the door and walked very quickly towards the front door. Harry turned the other way and went to his common room.

Back in the Hufflepuff area, he easily found Susan and Hannah. He explained a little about his guardian and said that they talked about how school was going. It was not hard to get them to drop the subject when he leaned over and lightly kissed Susan and then Hannah. Soon, the kisses turned into all out snogging. Harry still was not sure how the girls saw their casual relationship, but it would not matter any more in a few days.

((A/N: If you're still struggling to figure out why Sirius and Remus are so willing to help Harry escape, hold on through ch 5.))

Chapter 5

Monday morning brought a major change to the school, and more confrontation. At breakfast, the Headmaster announced that Professor Snape had left the school to pursue other activities. Harry was not surprised to hear a lot of applause; nor was he surprised to see disappointment on Dumbledore's face for a brief moment. The man must really be out of touch with the students if that surprised him, Harry thought. Out loud, he muttered, "Like studying the walls of prison from the inside," which brought a few chuckles from those around him.

Dumbledore then introduced a rotund man named Slughorn, and that he would teach Potions and be head of Slytherin house. That produced a polite applause. Harry decided that he would stick with Madam Pomfrey and the self-study method, but then again, he only had one more lesson with her.

The morning owls soon came and dropped off letters. Harry received none, but was elbowed slightly by Hannah a few minutes later.

"Harry? Why is the Headmaster looking at you like you killed his puppy?" Hannah looked more curious than as if she was trying to make fun of the Headmaster.

He turned to look at Susan, who was looking at him after hearing her friend's comment, and glanced over Susan's shoulder at Dumbledore. That infuriating disappointing expression was back, although this one seemed to have a component of anger mixed in it. He shrugged for the moment. "Haven't got a clue, but I'm sure I'll find out soon."

Harry was about to return to his breakfast when he heard a shout behind him. "I'll kill the bastard!" Harry turned around and saw a murderous looking Ron heading his way, as if he was going to crawl right over the Ravenclaw table to get to him. He was not completely sure the redhead was after him, but Ron's glare was locked on Harry as he stomped through the gap between the tables and onto the bench of the Ravenclaw table so he could step onto the table itself.

Before any teacher could do anything, twin red beams hit the rampaging boy in the back when he had one foot on the bench and he fell forward onto the Ravenclaw table before he slipped down onto the floor. Everyone looked at the two seventh year boys with their wands out. "Sorry," one Weasley twin said apologetically before the other continued, "a little family matter got out of hand."

Harry noticed that the twins looked resigned and a little sad, while Ginny looked downright unhappy. However, none of the three did more than sit there with their emotions on their face. Considering it was the Weasleys and it concerned him in some way, Harry thought it was not hard to figure out what had happened. He would put money on a bet that the Weasley father had been sacked because of his participation in Harry's kidnapping. He thought he now understood why Director Bones said that Dumbledore's trial would not happen for nearly a month. He guessed that she was putting all of Dumbledore's followers on trial first, and if they were found guilty, it would be that much easier to get Dumbledore. He actually admired her for her strategy. Still, one of the results was that he would have to watch the youngest Weasley boy carefully.

Another result was it removed one of the things Harry had considered doing before he left. He had thought about finding Ginny one evening and asking her if she would like to act upon one of her fantasies and kiss him, sort of a win-win situation for each of them. She had been reasonably nice to him, considering how obviously she had a crush on him, but he strongly suspected this week would not be a good time to ask. Oh well, he could always spend that time with Susan and Hannah, he thought with a smile.

Finishing breakfast, Harry started to leave the Great Hall with "his two followers", when the Headmaster stopped him.

"Harry, please come to my office, we need to talk." There was no smile or other friendly expression on the old man.

"If you need to discuss something with me, I think that here is a good enough place. What do you need, Professor?" he asked fairly coldly.

"This would be better done in private, Mr Potter..."

"No, sir," Harry said firmly, not backing down an inch. "Given what you've done to me in the past, I don't think I want to be alone with you. It's either here with my friends or not at all." He noticed that there were a number of Hufflepuffs around him, and Professor Sprout was within listening range as well.

Dumbledore had a very sour look at that. "Very well. I just wanted you to know that I will not approve this request for transfer." There were gasps from many of those nearby, including the two girls at his elbows. "You must stay at Hogwarts where I can protect you and help you with your magical training."

Harry could not help it, he laughed. This must have been the distraction Sirius had talked about. "Headmaster, I think you need to go reread the law you had passed. As it was explained to me, by the person who has to enforce it, I just have to stay in a magical school. I don't have to stay here. Therefore, that is not a request to change schools; it's more like a notification and a request for my records."

The old man's expression tightened. "Mr Potter, I am the only one who can fully protect you from Voldemort." Several people gasped at the name.

"And I don't care because I didn't ask for that protection," Harry explained slowly, as if talking to a young child. "I didn't ask to be brought into this school, just like I didn't ask to be brought into the Wizarding world." He could not stop now that he was on a roll. "In fact, it's actually quite ironic to me that you had a chance to achieve everything you probably want, if only you hadn't been so pushy."

Dumbledore looked taken aback at that statement.

"If you had only arranged a series of meetings and spent time with me, slowly explaining about magic and this world of yours, while slowly giving me magic lessons, eventually I would have become curious enough to come live here for a couple of years to see what it was like. But you didn't take Professor McGonagall's suggestion and do that. Instead, you kidnapped me and shoved this world down my throat," Harry accused him. "You didn't mean to, but you taught me

long ago when you abandoned me at the Dursleys that choices are important. You removed my choice in the matter and, therefore, you'll never get what you want. Now go to hell and leave me alone." He spun and walked out, leaving a flustered old man behind.

As he entered the corridor outside of the Great Hall, Harry realized that his two pretty shadows were still there. In fact, one of them grabbed his arm and pushed, while the other opened a door into a room. The door slammed and it was just the three of them. To Harry's relief, he saw no portraits.

"Look, I'm really sorry you found out that way," he quickly told them, trying to limit the damage. "I had planned on telling you later this week, as you deserved to know. I really had no idea my godfather was going to send in the request form so soon."

They both glared at him, neither saying anything for a long moment, until Hannah finally broke the silence. "That's why you haven't tried anything else with us, isn't it?"

Harry was surprised that was the first thing said, but he could deal with that. "Yeah, it just didn't seem right. I don't use friends. Being friendly is one thing, taking advantage of someone is a completely different thing." He spread his hands as if in helplessness. "I wouldn't have done anything after the one kiss, but you seemed to enjoy it and want it too. I'm really sorry, but as much as I'd like to, there is no future for us at the moment."

Susan sighed. "I'm upset with you, Harry. No -- I'm angry, really angry. I feel like our friendship has been an act and betrayal, and yet I know what's been done to you and will continue to be done to you if you stay." She growled a little in frustration. "I understand what you're saying, but it's just not fair to anyone -- us included."

Not knowing what else to do, Harry slowly pulled Susan into a hug and held her for a moment. She stood stiffly in his arms for a few seconds before slowly putting her arms around him. "I'm sorry I have to go, I really am. If I was going to stay, you are one of the reasons I would. Not everything is bad here and you are one of the best, Susan. I also promise I'm not just saying that, you really are. But you're right,

Dumbledore's mistake affects everyone." She squeezed him so he squeezed back before he let go.

Turning to Hannah, he pulled her into a hug too. "That's true about you too, Hannah. You're one of the best people I know here and a reason for me to stay, but Susan is right, I really can't stay no matter how much I like the two of you. One day I can return and we can sit down together and have a good time over dinner, but it won't be while Dumbledore is still alive."

"Where will you be going?" Hannah sadly asked.

Harry thought about that. Perhaps a small misdirection was in order, just in case this conversation was being listened in on. "Let's just say somewhere far away over a large body of water. I'll write from time to time and you can write back and tell me if you have a good boyfriend or not."

They both looked sadder and Harry realized that might not have been the best thing to say. "I'm not sure how, but I'll make arrangements to stay in touch if you want to. If you want to forget me as you go on with your life, I'll understand. I can see where you might not like me anymore."

Susan snorted. "I don't think it will be possible to forget you, Harry." Hannah agreed with her.

"Thanks," he sincerely told them both, giving them each a swift kiss on the cheek.

Hannah looked at Susan. "You know, History of Magic has already started and I don't really care about it anyway..."

"And we have a limited amount of time," Susan added, a slight smile coming to her face for the first time in the conversation.

"My thoughts exactly," Hannah agreed as she pulled Harry to her.

Harry felt her lips on his and her body pressed to his. Putting his arms around her, he did his best to enjoy every second of the experience,

knowing that Susan would demand equal treatment very soon. Yeah, it was going to be very hard to give this up, he thought.

It was Wednesday afternoon -- finally. Harry had come back to his dorm room during lunch. Fortunately, no one else was there, so he could easily shrink his trunk and put it in his pocket. Everything that was his was on him. He had to be at his flying lesson shortly, so he started heading that way.

His thoughts were on the good-bye kisses he had received last night. They had been something else. It had been extremely hard to stay a gentleman when the girls had been so forward. Their hands had "inspected the back pockets of his jeans" multiple times. Damn it was good to be him, he thought with a smile as he walked towards his lesson.

Only Harry's "street sense" caused him to notice a small movement and hear something being whispered. He twirled and jumped to the side as fast as possible, feeling something hit his jumper and a small pain on his stomach. As he finished turning, he saw Malfoy standing in an alcove with his wand out, so Harry lunged towards the boy and delivered a punch to the solar plexus of the Slytherin before a second spell could be cast.

While his attacker was bent over struggling to breathe, Harry quickly brought his knee up and rammed it into the boy's face. As Malfoy's head snapped up, Harry used the palm of his hand to smash the boy's face and knock Malfoy's head backwards into the wall. Malfoy slid down the wall into a crumple, blood coming out of the boy's broken nose and pooling on the ground. Harry just looked at his attacker and shook his head. The idiot had shot and had missed, then had not realized that if you're going to fight, you need to fight to win as quickly and as thoroughly as possible. Harry's experience on the street had taught him that.

Malfoy was still breathing, but his neck was bent at a funny angle. Harry wondered if magic could fix that, or if Malfoy would be unable to ever walk again. In the end, Harry did not care too much either way, although a part of him hoped Malfoy could not be fully healed. He was a bully and tried to terrorize most of the younger students, and

for some reason, the teachers had done nothing to stop his uncivil and even unlawful behavior.

Harry turned and started walking, checking himself out as he went. Seeing some spots on his clothes, he waved his hands over the few places that now had blood on them and he thought about being clean. The blood promptly went away. Looking at his stomach, he saw that his jumper and the shirt underneath were both cut and he was still bleeding slightly from a cut on his stomach. Fortunately, he had moved enough that the wound was shallow. Thinking of being healed, Harry waved his hands over his stomach and the wound closed. Next he thought of his clothes being repaired and they were. Other than being more tired than he had expected to be from having to do wandless magic, he was fine once more.

In the entrance hall, Professor Sprout waited for him and then escorted him to class. "Harry, I couldn't help but overhear your conversation with the Headmaster the other day," she told him as they started walking outside. The Headmaster still required him to be escorted by a teacher when he went outside.

"No problem," he told her nonchalantly. "I think quite a few people heard that conversation."

"So I should expect to lose you soon?" There was a slight look of sadness on her face as she asked.

Harry was struck by how caring she sounded. "I'm very sorry, Professor, as you're one of the good reasons to be here, but I can't stay near the man. He's just too controlling."

She walked him out of the castle courtyard and towards the field where the rest of the flying class was waiting. "I shall be sorry to see you go, but I do understand. Do know that Professor Dumbledore is not usually this way." She looked at him as if judging him for a moment. "Many of the staff have wondered why he is this way with you, and we really don't know. He's not like this with any other student. In fact, he's even mostly normal with regards to you, except for his obsession with making you stay here."

“Life is what it is, sometimes,” Harry said with a shrug. “Thanks for your help, Professor. If we don’t get to have a private talk like this again, I want you to know that I’m glad I was a Hufflepuff, and it’s because of you, Susan, and Hannah. The whole house has been good, but the three of you have shown me friendship that I will never forget.”

Sprout smiled at him and accepted the compliment as it was intended. “Thank you, Mr Potter.” She pointed to the group and Madam Hooch, who was flying towards them. “Here’s your class. I do hope you enjoy it.”

Harry nodded. He did not know if she knew this was his last hour here, but he wondered if she had suspected it. Turning around and walking over so he stood at the end of the Hufflepuff line, which was across from the Ravenclaw line, he watched Madam Hooch land her broom with an ease that made flying look simple.

“All right, everyone. Don’t just stand there, hold your hand over the broom next to you and command it to come up,” she instructed them.

Harry rolled his eyes. He supposed this was to help give everyone confidence, but it was much easier just to grab the broom, swing your leg over, and fly. Holding out his hand, he thought “up”, and the broom jumped to him as if eager to fly. The Firstie next to him looked at him in awe. Harry just smiled and told him. “It must like me. You try it.” It took three tries, but the little boy finally got his to respond. As Harry helped him, he pulled out his wand on the sly and discreetly transferred the tracking charms to this Firstie. He hated to do that to a fellow Hufflepuff, but he knew Dumbledore would cancel them as soon as he figured out they were no longer on Harry.

A few minutes later, they were kicking off the ground and hovering. Harry had an easy time of it, thanks to his guardian’s instruction. When they were allowed to slowly fly in circles and figure-eights, Harry did so, as well as go up to about thirty feet off the ground to avoid a collision with anyone else.

Hooch was busy with a couple of Ravenclaws, who were having trouble hovering, so Harry decided this was the time to go. He

hovered for a moment and pulled out the small broom from his pocket, waved his hand over it, and thought about it becoming large again; and it did. He stuck the Firebolt under him and then pulled the old school broom out from under his leg. He fell a foot or so until the Firebolt took over, but there was no problem otherwise. Not knowing what else to do with the school broom, he dropped it and then started to fly towards the mountain that he knew was to the south.

He had barely started moving when a red spell went whizzing by him. Harry quickly turned trying to be evasive and to see what was happening. Coming out of the castle and running his direction was Albus Dumbledore, wand in his hand. Dumbledore must have seen him in the class and decided it was bad -- which it was, he thought with a smirk. Dumbledore fired another spell and Harry quickly turned, the broom readily responding to his command. Leaning forward, the broom jumped forward with so much acceleration that Harry was glad he was low over the broom and hanging on tightly.

As the second spell passed him too, Harry was building up a lot of speed and flew straight at the Headmaster, swerving just slightly at the last second. He was moving fast enough that Dumbledore was not able to aim his third spell very well and it easily missed Harry. While the Headmaster was shouting some sort of nonsense at Harry, Harry ran into the old man's casting arm. The break of the arm was audible and the wand in the old man's hand went flying. To make sure his enemy could not easily come after him again, Harry adjusted his course a little so that he was chasing the flung wand. He reached down and caught it out of the air just before it hit the ground, then pulled up so he was at least ten feet off the ground and not in danger of crashing. He had to weave around one Firstie nearby, but that was not difficult.

An easy turn and Harry was speeding south instead of west. Tucking the captured wand into his pocket, Harry bent down low over the broom handle, feeling it speed up and the wind rushing through his hair. With a huge grin on his face, he flew towards his mountain. He would probably have a bruise on his shoulder from where he had hit the Headmaster's arm, but that was a small price to pay for the satisfaction he had gained from the action.

A quick glance behind him showed no pursers. Either Hooch did not care or knew she could not catch up. Or maybe she was trying to help an injured Dumbledore. Harry did not care which, as long as she stayed there. Remembering that he did not want to be seen by either Dumbledore or Muggles, Harry thought about becoming invisible while placing one hand on the other. He watched his hands and arms disappear with a grin, until he realized his clothes were still visible. Touching his clothes, he thought about them becoming invisible, and they faded out. His broom was still visible, but it was small and he did not want to tamper with the magic on it while flying very fast and very high in the air.

Reaching the mountain, he looked back one last time, as he had been checking behind him every little bit, and there was still no pursuit. Satisfied he had escaped, he flew over the mountain and down, out of sight from school. Now he was ready to go to his real destination, instead towards London that was in front of him. Turning southwest, he started looking for the large fingers of land heading out from the western coast of Scotland. Finding one about twenty minutes later, he followed it. Soon he was over the North Channel and Ireland was dead ahead.

At the coast of Ireland, Harry headed south. After almost an hour of flying, he heard a very loud "Harry". Putting on the brakes so fast he almost flew off the broom, Harry slowed and turned around. To his great relief, there stood Sirius and Remus on the beach near some tall rocks, waving their arms. He slowly flew over.

"There you are!" he told them with glee as he landed. He gave each a hug, but neither seemed to return it. "What?" he asked bewilderedly.

"Uh, Harry? Why can we only feel you and see a broom floating?" Lupin asked.

"Sorry?" He looked down and then realized the problem. "Hold on a sec." Still not wanting to show off, he pulled a wand out of his pocket and did a Finite on himself. His clothes and his body became visible again.

His godfather smiled and gave him a hug. "Harry, my boy."

"We almost missed you, you were going so fast, and because you were invisible," Lupin explained. "If I hadn't set up a ward to watch for approaching magical objects, you would have missed us."

Harry grinned. "Sorry," he told him unrepentantly. "I was in a hurry to get away and you told me not to be seen."

Sirius laughed. "Well, shrink that back down and stick it in your pocket. Moony's got a car on the side of the road above. Dublin's not too far away."

"OK. Is there some place like Diagon Alley there?" Harry asked. "I need to mail a few letters, telling some friends good-bye." He also wanted to send a letter to Gina, to let her and Steph know that he was alright and would be contacting them soon.

"There is. We can put on some disguises and go there after we check in at our hotel," Sirius told him as he started leading them up a path away from the beach.

"Thanks. Lead on McDuff." Sirius looked at Harry strangely. Harry just smiled and assumed it was yet another phrase that had not made it into the Wizarding world.

"Did you have any problems getting away?" Lupin asked as they started walking.

"A little," Harry admitted. "When I was going to flying class, that Malfoy idiot sent a cutting hex of some sort at my back."

"He what?!" Sirius was outraged. "Are you hurt?"

"No, and don't worry about it, I beat him up pretty badly. He was still breathing when I walked away, but he's going to be spending some serious time in the hospital, even with magic."

Lupin shook his head. "I'm sorry, Harry."

Harry shrugged. "It's over, as is the Headmaster's attempt to stop me."

Sirius looked at him questioningly. "Are you saying that Dumbledore tried to stop you too?"

"Yeah. I was flying with my class and was about to fly away when he started shooting spells at me while I was up in the air."

Sirius was muttering curses on the old man and Lupin looked angry too. "He could have killed you that way," Sirius finally said very darkly.

"But no worries," Harry said with a grin. "I knocked his wand out of his hand and brought it with me." He pulled the old man's wand out and held it up for the others to see.

Sirius laughed heartily.

"Try giving it a swish," Lupin encouraged him with a grin reappearing on his face.

Harry gave it wave and a huge shower of golden sparks came out of it. "Wow! That works even better for me than my normal wand. I'm keeping this."

Lupin nodded. "It seems reasonable for all the difficulty he gave you. I'm just glad you got away from him."

"Me too," Harry agreed. "But you want to know something weird?"

"What?" he got in stereo.

"When I was trying to leave, he shouted 'But the profits for me'. Why would he say that?" Harry suddenly got a worried look. "Sirius, please tell me you visited the bank and he can't take things out of my vault."

"Don't worry about it, Harry," Sirius replied. "You're the only one who can get into the vaults without a key, and they said your key is the only one to the trust vault. The family vault can only be opened by a

Potter or your spouse, so he can't ever get into that vault, which is where most of your money is."

"That's good to hear. I can take out money where we're going, can't I?"

"At any Gringotts branch," Sirius confirmed, "and there is one in Paris."

"Fantastic. Say, can we stop somewhere on the way to get a drink? I'm thirsty after all of that flying." Harry looked at the two men.

"Of course, Harry," Sirius said as he slapped him on the shoulder and shook it in a friendly way. "I wouldn't mind a pint. How about you, Moony?"

"Mr Moony agrees a pint would taste good." Lupin gave Harry a big grin.

"Did you two have any problems getting here?" Harry asked.

"Not at all, Harry," Sirius answered. "That group that was meeting at my house is still in disarray, so no one has been there the last few days." Harry nodded. "So we packed what we needed and then I sealed the house completely. Doors, windows, Flooes, no Apparation or Portkeys ... you name it and it's blocked, waiting for us to return some day."

"Wow! I didn't know you could do stuff like that," Harry said with amazement.

Sirius gave Harry's shoulder another friendly shake. "Harry, my boy, you have just begun to learn what magic can do and it is my privilege to be able to teach you. How about you, Mr Moony?"

"Indeed, Mr Padfoot. Mr Moony also points out that we need to get a Marauder name for our newest member."

"True, true," Sirius agreed sagely. "However, it will have to be probationary as he has not fulfilled all of the entrance requirements."

“Yes, good point,” Lupin agreed. “You shall have to teach him the secret transformation, but he still needs a name in the meantime.”

Harry had no clue what they were talking about, but he listened to the inane banter and enjoyed the moment with his new family. He had chosen well with these two.

Of course, now that he was free, he would have to discreetly write his two “sisters” to stay connected to his old family too.

Amelia Bones walked through Hogwarts with four Aurors flanking her, wondering what the problem was this time. She had been summoned by Minerva McGonagall. Entering the hospital wing, she saw the Headmaster and a boy in residence, as well as the nurse working on the boy and McGonagall overseeing it all.

McGonagall turned to her with a severe look on her face. “Amelia, I’m glad you’re here.”

That set Amelia’s hackles on edge, as that was the phrase that generally preceded her learning about something she would rather not. “What seems to be the trouble?”

“We have two incidents. I don’t believe they are related, although Albus does,” she explained.

“Go on.” Bones noticed that Dumbledore was not saying anything, despite the fact that he was sitting up on a bed, pillows behind him and his lower legs under the covers.

“First, from eye witness accounts, Harry Potter participated in an introductory flying class with a number of first years. During the class, Albus ran out from the castle, apparently afraid that Potter was going to try to fly away, and cast at least three Stunning spells at Potter while he was in the air.”

Amelia looked at her in alarm. Knocking someone out of the air like that was definitely considered assault and possibly even attempted murder.

“Fortunately,” McGonagall continued, “Potter appears to be a natural on the broom and avoided all three spells before running into Albus’s arm at high speed on the broom.”

Bones winced. That had to have hurt, she thought.

“Yes,” McGonagall said to the unasked question. “The arm was broken in four different places; he’s on Skel-Gro now to repair it.”

“And Mr Potter?” Bones asked.

“He flew off to the south towards London.” She glanced at Dumbledore for a moment. “Potter may have been planning this, as he had his own broom with him, having dropped the school broom used in the flying class, but whether this was planned or spur of the moment, I’d have to say that I don’t blame Mr Potter for leaving.”

Dumbledore looked very sour, but still said nothing; and with good reason, Bones thought. There was nothing he could say that would help him here. “Albus Dumbledore, you are in direct violation of your agreement to leave Mr Potter alone until your trial. As Director of the DMLE, I hereby revoke the agreement for you to remain outside of Ministry control until your trial by your own word. The fact that Mr Potter is no longer in the castle has no bearing on this decision, although in some ways, it makes me want to take you into custody even more as I fear you may attempt to go after him. Wallace, Monroe? Guard him until his treatment is done and he is released. Then take him to a holding cell.” With this new charge to add to the others, she felt she could withstand the pressure of arresting him now.

“Yes, Director,” one of Aurors said as he walked up to Dumbledore and cast a spell on him to stick him to the bed until manacles could be put on when his broken arm was healed.

“I need his wand,” Bones ordered.

A slight smile now came over McGonagall. "That is a problem. You see, Mr Potter seems to have it."

Bones's eyebrows shot to the top of her forehead. "Excuse me? Potter disarmed Dumbledore?"

"I was told," McGonagall said, the corners of her mouth twitching, "that when Mr Potter ran into Dumbledore, he knocked the wand flying out of Albus's hand. It's an unusual way to disarm an opponent, but it worked admirably in this case."

"And?" Bones could tell McGonagall liked this part of the story.

"It seems that not only is Potter a natural flyer, but he went after the wand and caught it before it could hit the ground, ensuring Albus could no longer cast spells at him. That was when he flew off." McGonagall had a look of admiration on her, and Bones could understand why.

"So, he's not only a natural flyer, but could probably become a natural seeker for a Quidditch team," she reasoned out loud.

"That was my thought as well." McGonagall nodded acknowledgement.

It was all Amelia could do not to laugh and only to smile. Dumbledore deserved this. "Very interesting. However, I believe you said there was a second reason for me to be here?"

McGonagall instantly turned serious. "Yes. Not long after the other incident, Mr Malfoy was found unconscious in a second floor corridor, with a small pool of blood around his head."

Amelia moved over to the other bed and clearly saw the unconscious Malfoy boy for the first time. His face was bruised and swollen. Someone had done a real number on him. "What else do you know about this?"

"We've found nothing to indicate who did it. There were no spells casts on Mr Malfoy either. He was used as a punching bag for all we

can tell,” McGonagall said with some disgust. “Poppy says that he will live, however, his neck was broken and she’s not sure it can be fixed. If not, he will have no use of anything below the neck.”

Bones’s gaze jerked over to McGonagall. “A complete invalid?” McGonagall nodded. Bones thought about the situation. Crimes with no witnesses were very tough to solve. “Is Mr Malfoy’s wand here?” Perhaps it would provide a clue.

McGonagall walked over to the bedside table and pick up a wand, handing it to the Director. She cast “Prior Incantato” on the boy’s wand, and was shocked to see an image of “Sectumsempra” come out of the wand, then a contraception spell, a Vanishing spell, and an Imperious spell before she ended her revealing spell. The semi-Dark cutting spell was bad enough, but an Unforgivable? She looked at McGonagall who was very pale.

“I,” McGonagall started and then sputtered for a moment. “I request that charges be brought against Mr Malfoy for the use of an Unforgivable. I shall start an investigation into whom he might have used it on, which I suspect will lead to other charges.”

Bones nodded. It was the right thing to do. “Obviously, we can’t tell until Malfoy wakes up, but it looks like he used the Slashing spell on someone and missed, and that someone reacted very aggressively to that. Should that have been Mr Potter,” she looked over at Dumbledore who was looking disappointed, “then I don’t believe there he would be in any legal trouble as he would have acted in self-defense. But we shall still investigate the case anyway. Ferguson? Watch over Mr Malfoy, although it appears we may have to create a schedule for that until he can be moved to a holding cell. Minerva, can you please take me to the site where Malfoy was attacked?”

After a few more minutes of talking to Minerva while they walked, Amelia saw the site of attack. There was not a single clue to be found. She had a feeling that the only way the truth would be found would be if Veritaserum was given to the Malfoy boy. With a good-bye to Minerva, she returned to her office.

In the office, her secretary handed her a letter. "This just came in via Express Floo Mail, Director." Amelia took it to her office and made herself comfortable. Opening the letter, she read:

Dear Director Bones,

I hope this finds you well. I am doing fine now.

I thought you should know that I appreciate everything you have done for me. I regret that I can not appear at Snape's or Dumbledore's upcoming trial, as I am now outside of your jurisdiction. You have my statements and memories to help you, and if that is not enough, then Magical Britain is doomed and will eventually fall from internal rot, much as Rome did centuries ago.

Please understand that I have to do this, as I can not allow Dumbledore to control me, no matter how good his intentions. My life is my choice, not his, most especially when he will not explain what his choice is.

You, as well as your niece Susan, Hannah, Professors Sprout and McGonagall, are a few reasons my leaving was harder than I had originally thought. Again, thank you for all the help and kind words. Perhaps I will return to Britain some day, but as I told Susan, not before a meddlesome Headmaster dies some day in the future.

Harry Potter

p.s. Sirius Black says that he may hold you to the promise of a trial for him one day, but for now, don't waste manpower looking for him. Instead, use the effort to fight the upcoming war Dumbledore seems to think is coming -- if he's correct.

Amelia folded the letter back up and placed it on her desk. She could attempt to track its journey, but decided not to. That young man had had enough problems. She could not decide what to do about Dumbledore, but his trial would decide his fate. At least Harry would have some peace from the obsessed Headmaster.

Sirius Black was another issue. It sounded like he was now out of the country too, probably with Harry. She wondered if Remus Lupin was with those two. Probably, she finally decided. There were so many unanswered why's around that boy, mostly because of Dumbledore. She wondered if the Headmaster was going senile.

The Malfoy case was slightly strange. Finding that the possible victim of one crime had committed a crime of his own was not an every day occurrence, but it was also not unheard of either. As for the attack, with magic, many crimes were never solved, as it was too easy to remove evidence. She considered the violence done upon young Malfoy. His father would be livid if he could not be healed, but Amelia could not bring herself to care much. For once, it seemed justice had been unknowingly served. Having no use of one's body was not that far removed from a life sentence in Azkaban, the normal sentence for using an Unforgivable curse on a person. And if Potter had hurt Malfoy in self-defense, which she really had no opinion on, then perhaps the world was a better place without Death Eater like activity -- in a school of all places. She shuddered at the thought of her niece in a place where that sort of thing happened. It was not hard to guess what Malfoy had done, with an Imperious curse, a contraception spell, and a Vanishing spell. The only real question was which young woman was the victim. Perhaps that charge on the boy would shut up the elder Malfoy, but she suspected it would not.

Amelia shook her head and picked up a form to start writing a crime report. It was going to be another long evening.

((A/N: There's the story. All that's left is the epilogue.

I'm sure some are asking why Sirius and Remus would leave the war behind when they had fought so hard earlier. My take is that because Harry disappeared, Sirius and Lupin felt guiltier about not taking care of Harry, so they were much more willing to support what he wanted to do. The decision to leave was helped by the fact that Dumbledore never told anyone why Harry was so special (causing everyone to guess), so the 2 Marauders did not know they and Harry needed to stay. Holding information secret can be good operational security, but there is a danger in the right people not knowing critical information (see book5 for an example of Dumbledore failing to communicate

needed information). As a fun thought exercise, think about what happened in the books and what would have happened if Dumbledore and the Trio had openly shared all they found out in a timely manner. How many of the problems that the “good side” faced would have not happened or been smaller and easier to handle if they had shared more?

I’m sure some people are asking (or should be asking :-)) what Dumbledore was trying to say to Harry as he flew off. If you haven’t figured it out, here’s a hint. Harry did mishear him and it was “But the ---!”, i.e. there were only 3 words. And yes, Albus's wand is the Elder Wand, which is why it works for Harry.))

Chapter 6 - Epilogue

Harry was walking down the French version of Diagon Alley in Paris two days after his great escape. He was amused by the fact that while it was in a different country and so had a different “flavor”, it was still basically the same as the Wizarding shopping district in London. All the same stuff was being sold, only a different language was being used, and the architecture was different too.

He was in his “older look” again, as he had before all of the funny business with Dumbledore, heading to Gringotts. He not only needed some more Galleons, but French Francs as well. Sirius and Remus had deemed this place safe enough for Harry to go alone, as long as he was in disguise and had his wand, so they were out taking care of other things like trying to find a place to live.

Nearing the bank, he passed a family that had a “strange” feel to them. The dark-haired man seemed normal enough, but his very pretty silvery-blond wife and daughter had an unusual feel to them, as if they demanded that Harry look at them. He did take a look and then smiled, enjoying the sight of two pretty women, but then he pulled his vision away and continued on.

As he reached the bank steps, Harry heard several Apparation cracks behind him. Fearing Dumbledore had followed him, he whipped out his wand as he turned around. Six men in black robes surrounded the family of three he had just passed. He was impressed that the man already had his wand out and was starting to cast at his attackers; the daughter almost had her wand out too. While Harry had no idea who these people were, no one should be attacked, and the odds were quite unsporting.

Harry started firing Stunning spells at the attackers too. He really only had a limited selection of spells, as Remus had only taught him the basics and he had not had time to pick up more in Hogwarts. Still, a fourth -- and unexpected -- wand helped greatly, especially as he was “behind” the family and was able to protect their back. After taking out two attackers, he rushed forward to help with the attackers on the front when the mother went down. She had been trying to maintain a shield while the father and daughter were taking out the attackers.

Harry continued to run forward, only now he was starting the shield spell and cast the strongest one he could imagine right in front of the remaining two victims.

Realizing he had unintentionally cast the shield spell with his left hand, Harry thought a Stunning spell with his wand at the man who had taken out the mother. He smiled in triumph when the man went down, only to be surprised when a large blast hit his shield. It knocked him sideways into the girl knocking them both down. He hit his head on the pavement which caused him to drop the shield. Harry's world went black.

The world slowly returned to Harry, but he was careful to feign sleep while he took stock of his situation, having been in this position in the not too distance past. He really hoped he had not been kidnapped again. Other than a splitting headache, he felt reasonably normal. Expanding his senses, he realized there were two soft voices talking nearby, but there was something very strange about them. After a few seconds, he realized they were talking in French. Grateful that Gina had made him pay attention to the French lessons that were broadcast on the BBC back home, he "tuned" his ear to the new language to gather information. He was not fluent and they were not talking slow, but he was able to catch most of the words. He was much better at understanding French than speaking it.

"I thought you said he should be awake soon." It was a man's voice.

"He should, but with a blow to the head, the time is ---." Harry missed the last word, but suspect the woman meant unknown, or something similar. "How will you handle this?"

"I must find out who he is and if he was connected with those ---."

"Jean-Aimé!" She sounded appalled. "He helped us. You said there were two behind us you never knew about and that he must have ---. And his ---. That protected both of you at the end. You can not believe..."

"I believe nothing," he cut her off with a course whisper. "I must have the facts first. It could be a setup."

"He is but a boy, Fleur's age." Harry assumed she meant the daughter, but he had had a hard time guessing the girl's age in the quick glance he had given her.

"Those --- in England use little boys for evil things," the man argued, his voice growing louder. Harry was not sure what the word meant that he had not understood, but the context and the anger in the man's voice argued for the word to have a bad meaning.

"He saved us," she whispered back just as fiercely and stamped her foot to emphasize her point. "He will be treated well before we return him to Paris."

"Yes, Apolline," the man said with resignation.

Harry almost laughed as he guessed at the glare from the woman. Well, it was time to "wake up". Waiting a few more seconds, he groaned a little and moved his head slightly. A few seconds later, there were light footsteps heading his direction. He slowly opened his eyes and made a production out of blinking. Everything was blurry, as he didn't have his glasses, but he saw what must be a face with silvery-blond hair around it. It must be the mother. She handed him his glasses.

"Do you understand me?" she asked in French.

"English?" he asked hopefully with a gravelly voice, planning to keep his French secret. It was the mother next to him.

"Yes. How do you feel?" she asked him in fluent English, although there was a slight accent attached to it.

"My head really hurts and I need some water."

"Of course. Let me help you sit up, slowly though." She helped him sit up and move back against the headboard. As she handed him a glass of water, he saw the dark-haired man in the doorway. Now that

he could take a long look, Harry noticed that the man was not overly tall and a little on the portly side. He also had a pointed goatee. When eye contact was made, the man walked into the room and stood at the end of the bed.

The man bowed his head slightly in greeting. "I am Jean-Aimé Delacour, and this is my wife Apolline. Whom am I addressing?" His English was flawless, which coupled with the wife's very good English made for an unusual French couple, or so he thought.

Harry took another sip of water. "I'm Harry Potter, recently from England, as I'm sure you can tell by my accent." That was the name on the passport Remus had doctored for him.

The French man nodded. "And are you visiting or what, Mr Potter?"

Harry stuck to the truth for the moment. "I and my guardians left England due to a personal problem. We're considering living here, assuming we can find a place." Something about the man made him seem very official, so just to be safe, Harry asked, "Can you please tell me if we need to contact the Ministry here?" Remus was supposed to be handling that, but information from a second source never hurt.

The man smiled. "Yes, you will need to file an immigration form; I can help you with that, if you can help me with something?" Harry nodded. "Have you ever heard my name before, Mr Potter?"

Harry shook his head. "No, I've been home-schooled and we have not covered French magical history."

"Then may I ask why you defended us?" It was asked in a friendly tone, but the look of his eyes told him the man was deadly serious.

The look and the fact that he had asked if Harry knew his name, led Harry to believe he was someone important. "Because it was the right thing to do. They also did not give you very sporting odds, six against three and trying to catch you by surprise to boot. And that's not mentioning trying to hex you from behind."

Jean-Aimé chuckled and his posture relaxed slightly. “No, it was not very -- sporting -- as you say.”

“If I may ask, why am I here?” Harry hoped for a different answer than Dumbledore had given him.

“Do you remember what happened at the end of the fight?” Harry shook his head. “Ah, let me explain then. After your shield stopped several spell, one of the attackers send a Blasting hex at us and, amazingly, your shield held just long enough. You are a very powerful young wizard, Mr Porter.”

“Thanks,” Harry said quietly.

The man smiled. “While your shield held, I removed the last two attackers and found you unconscious on the ground. I assume you hit your head hard enough to knock you out.” Harry nodded. “You were also under my unconscious daughter, so she thanks you for breaking her fall.”

Harry’s eyes went wide at hearing that. “I didn’t mean to... I mean I wasn’t trying to... Oh, shit,” he finally said and buried his face in his hands. He was surprised and relieved to hear two laughs, one was very pleasing.

Jean-Aimé was grinning at him when Harry looked up. “You have no worries, Mr Porter. I saw what happened and know there were no ill-intentions.”

Harry heard a light clearing of the throat from beside him and saw his wife glaring at her husband.

“In fact, as my wife just reminded me, I have been too slow to also give you our thanks for your timely help, Mr Porter. Without you there, it would have gone much worse. The fight was over very quickly, so injuries, and potentially our kidnapping, were avoided. As part of our thanks, we brought you here to recover. When you are ready, I shall help you return to Paris, unless you would like to remain here for a while as our guest.”

“Thank you, Mr, uh, Delacour, was it?” The man nodded. “But I really need to get back before my guardian and friend become worried for me.”

“I understand, but we can also send a house-elf with a message so they do not become worried. You could return after dinner,” the man offered.

“That would be nice, but I wouldn’t want to intrude,” Harry told them.

“There would be no intrusion from the young man who helped save us,” Mrs Delacour replied. “I will inform the cook that we will have a guest,” she told him with a smile that warmed his heart. He felt some sort of magical pressure from her, but he could not figure out what it was. “Do you have any food allergies we should be aware of?”

“No, ma’am.”

“Then perhaps a sampling of family dishes to welcome you to France. Jean-Aimé, please give him something to write with so he can send a note to his friends.”

“Of course, my dear.”

Mrs Delacour smiled again at Harry, got up, whispered something surprising to her husband based on his expression. “I shall return soon with a Headache Potion,” she said before she left.

“A moment please,” the man told him and left as well, leaving Harry with a quandary and a moment to think. What could he tell the man?

A minute later, the man returned with some parchment, a quill, and a bottle of ink. Harry quickly wrote a short message detailing that he had met a French family with a daughter, who had invited him to dinner, and that he would be late getting back. He thought Sirius would like the part about dinner with a girl. He addressed it to Orion Black at the hotel they were staying at.

Handing the letter to the man, Harry decided to go for broke. "Mr Delacour, from what you said, am I correct in guessing that you are an important person here?"

"That depends on who you ask," he said quietly with a smile. "I work at our Ministry of Magic, and I am what you would call the Head of the International Relations Department. Of course, we have a different name of for it, but that is what your English Ministry calls it."

"I see," Harry nodded. "Mr Delacour?" he asked tentatively, "I came here because I was being personally, ah, persecuted you might say. Would there be a problem if I stayed here, in France I mean."

"I believe not, but if you will tell me about your 'persecution', I can better answer the question." The hard look in the eyes was back.

Harry swallowed and looked away from the man to avoid the gaze. "The short version is that I was kidnapped by Albus Dumbledore." He suddenly stopped. "Do you know who he is?"

"Yes, the Supreme Mugwump of the International Confederation of Wizards and holder of many other titles in England. That is quite a charge to bring against a man of his reputation, but please go on." Delacour was very matter-of-fact about it all so far.

"He took me off the street and wouldn't let me go. He even forced me attend his school, Hogwarts. I only escaped two days ago by flying a broom to Ireland to meet my godfather and his friend, both of whom were blackmailed not to help me. From there, we took a Muggle airplane to Paris."

Delacour sat for a moment. "That is quite a tale," he said noncommittally.

"It's all true, and, well, if I have to fill out an immigration form, I should also tell you that my name is not really Harry Potter. We did that so Dumbledore wouldn't find us."

"I see," Delacour calmly went on. "It is always better to be truthful -- Mr Potter."

At the use of his real name, Harry's head whipped around to look at the man, who was smiling ever so slightly.

"Yes, Mr Potter, I knew who you were shortly after we brought you here. Your glamour is very good, but my wife can easily detect them due to an inherited ability. Your sudden reappearance back into the Wizarding world, and your picture with your famous scar, was news all over Europe. Of course," his grin became very pronounced now, "your letter against Dumbledore and his upcoming trial also made the news all over Europe."

Harry considered that. "So your knowing and yet hiding that you knew me was a test."

The man shrugged slightly. "Perhaps only a small one. I would have helped you return to Paris regardless, but now that you have, how do you say it, come clean, I will also offer to help you stay here and speak on your behalf to my government. Your request will be easily approved now."

"Thank you, sir. I know you don't have to do that, but I do thank you," Harry told him with as much honesty as he could muster.

"You are welcome, Mr Potter. What are your real plans?"

"They are a little up in the air, but after we get a place to stay, my guardians will be trying to find work, as will I, and I'll continue my studies with my guardians. I have a lot to learn about magic," Harry said with conviction.

Delacour chuckled. "We all do. Do you know any French? That would be helpful."

Deciding it would help his position, he said in slow halting French. "I know ... a little. I will get ... better."

"Your effort is admirable," Delacour complimented him, still in English to make it easier. "I dare say that you will do well after six months of living here. In fact, if you have spare time on the weekend, you

should ask my daughter for lessons. She does not speak English as well as her mother and has been trying to get better. You could help her with English and she could help you with French,” he suggested.

Delacour’s expression changed to one of interest, as if trying to solve a puzzle. “Before I go have an elf deliver your letter, would you be so kind to tell me how you ignore the Veela allure my wife gives off?”

Harry was not sure what to say to that. “I don’t know, and what is Veela allure?”

Delacour chuckled. “Bad luck on my part and I now owe my wife a trip shopping.” At Harry’s quizzical look, he continued. “My wife is a Veela, as is my daughter. Did you not study them in school?”

“No sir, I haven’t gotten that far yet.” Harry wondered why this mattered.

“Yes, well, Veela naturally have a magical allure about them that causes most men to, how shall I put this, not act like their normal selves. However, you acted normally around my wife and she bet me that you had a natural resistance, as I do.”

“How else is there to resist it?” Harry asked.

“There are a few magics that will help, but even they have a limited effect. Since you naturally have no problem, I can easily predict that my daughter will be very delighted to spend time with you and help you with your French and any schooling you might need assistance with,” he said with an easy smile. “At least you are honorable.” At Harry’s puzzled look, the man chuckled again and left.

Harry knew there was something important he was missing from that conversation, but he could not figure it out.

Dinner went very well, in Harry’s opinion. Fleur did seem very taken with him, talking to him so much her parents barely talked with him at all. She was pretty, but her French accent was captivating, as was

her sharp intellect. They talked about numerous subjects, although most of them had to do with how wizards lived in France. Harry found it all very fascinating. He also found out that she had a little sister who had just started going to Beauxbatons, the French magical school.

Despite Harry's obvious fascination with Fleur, her father did not seem upset and surprised him before he left for the evening. He handed Harry three immigration forms, all with his signature on the bottom to help "smooth the way".

He also told Harry that he owned a cottage down the road just outside of the nearest little town, and that he and his guardians could stay there. It was empty and the rent was only one hundred Galleons a month. Harry promised to have his guardians look at it.

Finally, Mr Delacour also offered Harry a part-time job on his estate, saying that one of his workers had recently left. Fleur beamed at that and Harry had to admit that did sound very nice. He promised the man an answer tomorrow, after they looked at the cottage. Jean-Aimé Delacour handed Harry a Portkey and said that it would take him between his front gate and the shopping district in Paris, and that he hoped to see Harry tomorrow. A "thank you" kiss from Fleur on the cheek guaranteed Harry would return.

Minerva McGonagall led three men through her castle towards the Hogwarts hospital wing. The hospital was completely full, and in fact, only the most severely wounded were here. There were many more wounded in many of the classrooms around the castle. St Mungo's had sent most of their staff to help, and many individuals who had basic medical training, or even just wished to volunteer, were helping where they could. She was feeling very lucky to have escaped injury in what people were calling the "Final Battle", but her luck was mostly due to the fact that she had been in charge of defending Hogwarts, causing her to be inside the castle walls.

Voldemort had tried to end the war once and for all, and he had wanted to take Hogwarts as a statement to the world. Fortunately, they had had just enough warning to assemble a defense of the castle and for the current Minister for Magic, Rufus Scrimgeour, to

call in an international force to help them defeat the Death Eaters and Dark creatures that Voldemort had assembled.

It had all started nearly four years ago after Dumbledore had become more “barmy” than normal and kidnapped Harry Potter. Potter had fled the country and Dumbledore had barely avoided a trial for the kidnapping by bargaining to give up the Headmaster role, his Chief Warlock position, his Supreme Mugwump position, and by paying some hefty fines. Dumbledore had managed to stay in the forefront of the war only because shortly after his non-trial, Minister Fudge and Amelia Bones had been murdered by Death Eaters, and Scrimgeour had hired Dumbledore to head a Department of War.

She sighed as she went up the last flight of stairs. The next three years had not been good. Despite Dumbledore’s personal magical power and knowledge, they had fought a reactionary war and it had not gone well. Thus, in desperation, about a year ago, Scrimgeour finally agreed that Magical Britain could not win on her own and sought help from the international community. A force had finally been put together to respond to Britain’s aid should Voldemort ever mass his troops.

Voldemort had massed his troops this morning and it had been horrific. Despite their forces being led by Dumbledore and Scrimgeour on the fields of Hogwarts, and despite the international force Portkeying into the Forbidden Forest to attack Voldemort’s forces from the rear, the injuries and loss of life had been terrible. To make matters worse, the number of deaths was expected to go up.

As much as McGonagall now personally disliked Albus Dumbledore, she still professionally respected his magical knowledge and ability. He would be missed by many all over the world when he “left”, and she had been led to believe that his “next great adventure” would be starting soon.

Opening the doors to the hospital wing, she led the men in and over to the bed she had already visited once this day. He looked asleep, so she spoke softly. “Albus?” His eyes snapped open and looked at her. “I have the men you requested.”

She stepped to the end of the bed and motioned the three soldiers forward.

“Colonel Joachim Gruene of Germany, Herr Dumbledore,” the oldest said.

“Sergeant Manuel Ortiz of Spain, Senor Dumbledore,” the next said.

“Sergeant Running Horse from the US, Mr Dumbledore,” the last said.

“Gentlemen,” Dumbledore weakly said with a gravelly voice, “I asked for the ones who defeated Voldemort. So I understand you were three were there?”

The two younger ones looked to the colonel. “We were the ones who defeated him,” the senior man answered.

“Which one of you did it and what happened? I must know,” Dumbledore wheezed.

It seemed to take most of Dumbledore’s strength to get that little out. McGonagall was very saddened by the pain her former superior must be in after the number of curses You-Know-Who had inflicted upon him.

The colonel continued being the spokesperson. “I’m afraid we don’t know exactly who killed that -- monster. We were all moving in his direction as he was one of the last ones fighting, and all three of us cast a spell at the same time, causing a bright flash. When we could see again, this Dark Lord of yours was a burnt shell with his head a meter from his body.”

Dumbledore closed his eyes and wheezed, “That can’t be.”

“What can’t be, Albus?” McGonagall asked in a concerned tone. He was so weak after several of the curses Voldemort inflicted upon him, the healers did not expect him to survive the day.

“The prophecy, it doesn’t match the prophecy...”

The other four all looked at each other, hoping someone could explain. Suddenly, it all clicked in Minerva's mind.

"Albus, are you saying there was a prophecy about the end of You-Know-Who?"

"Potter, it should have been Potter," Dumbledore got out in a coarse whisper, before a hacking cough came out.

McGonagall walked around to the other side and gave him some water, which he greedily drank.

"My grandmother," Sergeant Running Horse said, "has long maintained that prophecies are worth little. Many times, they are not obvious even when interpreted after the event."

"If you could tell us the prophecy, Albus, we might be able to help you," McGonagall kindly told him.

"Maybe it doesn't matter now," Dumbledore said. He cleared his throat and then recited it.

"The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches...
one who will thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies...
and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not...
and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives."
(mostly quoted from "OotP" by JKR)

"You don't match," Dumbledore weakly said. "It's not over yet." He seemed to lose all life as he went limp and relaxed fully on the bed.

"I do not think it is as bad as you think, Herr Dumbledore," the colonel told him. "I believe I could fit the description. Over the course of the two hour battle, I fought with him three separate times. I was born on the 31st of July. During our first meeting this morning, he hit me with a cutting curse that will leave a scar. And, Herr Dumbledore, I believe I killed him with a specialized fire spell that is only in my family,

passed down from father to son. There is the fulfillment of your prophecy.”

“But,” Dumbledore argued with effort, “you were not born in the right year or the right country.”

The colonel shrugged. “If you say that I must be born in the year the prophecy was made, then no. However, I must point out that the prophecy does not specify either the year or the country. By literal interpretation, I must be the one.”

Ortiz coughed quietly. “If I may, colonel?” The officer nodded. “I too met the monster three different times in battle today, was born on the 31st of July, received a wound which will scar, and I hit him with a cutting spell that decapitated him which I personally developed and he would have had no knowledge of. It might have been me the prophecy spoke of.”

“But...” Dumbledore started to argue and then gave up.

McGonagall could tell that Dumbledore realized the same answers to his argument would apply here.

“Mr Dumbledore?” the American spoke up. “I too meet all of the qualifications, the three times in battle today, and the new scar on my shoulder being the most obvious. I was born on the last day of the seventh lunar month, which I believe would also count. Lastly, I hit your Dark Lord with a spell to remove his soul from his body, a spell from my native Indian magic, which I sincerely doubt he knew, as it is a closely guarded secret among my tribe.”

“What are the odds?” McGonagall whispered, but they all heard her.

Sergeant Running Horse smiled. “As my grandmother would say, if Fate has an idea in mind, she will make sure it happens.”

Dumbledore choked a little as he tried to cough. “But Potter...”

“Albus, that’s why you tried to force Harry Potter to come to school, wasn’t it?” She fixed him with a piercing stare. “You thought he was

the fulfillment of your prophecy -- a prophecy you never shared or tried to get help on."

He lay there for a moment before he nodded every so slightly. "Minerva, tell Potter," he paused, "tell Harry, I'm sorry. I never wanted to hurt him, I just wanted him to save our world."

McGonagall snorted in a most unladylike fashion. "That should have been his choice, prophecy or no prophecy."

Dumbledore nodded slightly again. "In my house, there is a silver cloak." He seemed to be gasping for breath and straining to breathe. "It is his father's..." he whispered before his head limply fell to the side.

McGonagall just shook her head at the loss. He had not been perfect, far from it in fact, but his heart had been in the right place. If only he had done a few things differently.

Looking up with tears in her eyes, she said, "I believe we're done here. Thank you for coming, and please thank your men." They gave their condolences and left. Minerva pulled the sheet up over her former friend and slowly made her way back to her office. She had a letter of apology to write and a cloak to find.

Harry came to the Delacour dining table for breakfast. He smiled and greeted Jean-Aimé and Apolline, who were in conversation with Aimee and Remus over something in the news paper in front of them. He and Remus had moved into the Delacour manor as permanent guests three months ago when Sirius had married a French witch. Their moving allowed Sirius and his wife to have the cottage to themselves. Harry never ceased to be amazed at how easy it had been for Sirius to prove his innocence here, while he was still wanted for crimes in Britain. Fortunately, France would not allow him to be extradited.

Remus looked so much better than he had when they have moved here four years ago. Of course, Harry knew exactly why. After he had revealed to Remus how he could do "wish magic" and Remus picked his surprised jaw off the floor, they had worked on that form of "pure magic" very intensely. While hard and physically demanding, Harry

could do almost any magical spell now, as long as he knew what it was supposed to do. That had led him to try his magic on Remus, unbeknownst to his friend.

One night with a full moon, Harry stunned Remus while he was in werewolf form in the little stone shed behind their cottage, and then “laid his hands on him”. A very exhausting minute later, Remus started changing. When the transformation was done, Remus had lost the characteristic appearance of a werewolf and now looked like a normal wolf. After some testing, it was determined that Remus was no longer a werewolf, but a wolf Animagus. The next full moon did nothing to him, and there was much rejoicing amongst the three friends.

That was six months ago and now Apolline’s sister, Amiee was now “permanently visiting”, as Remus had retained his werewolf resiliency to Veela allure. It was looking like the two were becoming serious, much to the delight of everyone in the manor.

Harry was always amused to see Sirius around the Veela. The “old dog” had learned Occlumency to help with the Veela allure, but he was not totally immune to it like Jean-Aimé, Remus, and Harry were. Fortunately, Sirius’s new wife was very understanding.

He took a seat at the dining table across from Gabrielle, who was in her last week home before the start of her fifth year at Beauxbatons.

“Good-morning, Harry,” she said with a very winning smile. The girl had looked small for her age when he first met her. When her Veela genes kicked in at puberty, she had matured in about two years. At fifteen, the “little” witch looked seventeen -- and as hot as her sister. If he met them both for the first time today, he would have been hard pressed to say who he thought was better looking.

“Good-morning, Gabby. Excited about going back to school?” he asked while dishing up some eggs and then fruit.

“No,” she pouted so cutely it should be illegal, he thought. “You will not be there.”

“And you can not have Harry, Gabby. How many times have I told you that?” Fleur asked rhetorically before she kissed Harry on the lips and sat down next him, her left hand conspicuously visible with a large diamond on it, which just seemed to make Gabrielle pout more.

The “language lessons” had gone so well for them that they spent almost all of Fleur’s free time together. Most of her daytime was spent on her job in the Paris branch of Gringotts. Most of Harry’s day was now spent at Delacour manor learning how to run it, as the old estate manager was planning to retire in a few years, and Jean-Aimé had picked Harry to take over the job of running the large estate. Because of Jean-Aimé’s trust and how well Harry and his half-Veela girlfriend got along, Harry had asked Fleur to marry him a month ago.

“Don’t worry, Gabby,” Harry told her as he looked at Fleur and winked, “you’ll find someone for yourself one day. A young woman as beautiful as you will have no problem finding someone.”

The young Veela beamed, her crush on Harry coming back full force.

“Gabrielle!” He mother called sharply. “What have I told you about controlling your allure? I can feel it all the way down at this end of the table,” she said disapprovingly.

“Sorry, mother,” Gabby said contritely as her “glow” dimmed.

Harry felt the magical pressure lessen dramatically. He always found it amusing how simple comments could make her react. Fleur said it was a sign that Gabby was not finished maturing, but Harry did not think so. Even though he knew that Gabby knew that he was immune to her allure, he still thought that she was trying to “win him” from her sister. After being in the family for four years, he had come to learn how rare it was for men to be naturally immune to Veela allure. Harry knew that Fleur would not be sharing her husband, despite the Veela custom that allowed it. Gabby was just going to have to find her own husband, and Harry was just fine with that. He strongly suspected, and Jean-Aimé had implied on several occasions, that handling a Veela wife took a lot of hard work. Harry could not imagine trying to deal with two. Also, his English Muggle upbringing just said “no” to having two wives.

He looked at Fleur and asked, "So, what's on the wedding planning schedule this weekend?"

"Robes," Fleur said before daintily eating a strawberry.

Harry managed to suppress a groan. While he now wore wizarding robes when required, he still thought of them as uni-sex dresses and hated them.

"Cheer up, Harry," he heard whispered in his ear. "If you're a good and cooperative wizard, I'll show you what I wear under my robes. I think you'll like my French undergarments."

Harry turned and since her lips were right there, he kissed her. Something to be grabbed whenever possible, he had found. "You have a deal," he told her with a large grin. Yes, he thought, the Wizarding world was not so bad, when you were with the right wizards and witches -- especially the witches.

Jean-Aimé gave an exclamation of surprise before he set the newspaper down and excitedly called, "Harry! Good news, Harry! The war in England is over!"

"Are you serious?" Harry asked incredulously. It had been going on for over four years, starting soon after Harry had left Britain.

"Yes. It says so in the International Section. The English wizard known as Voldemort was killed yesterday when he and his army attacked the magical school Hogwarts." Harry shuddered at the thought of being there. "Apparently the English side was being lead by Dumbledore and Minister Scrimgeour. While they and many Aurors defended the school, an international force attacked Voldemort from the rear. When the two hour battle was finished, Voldemort had been decapitated and incinerated."

"Jean-Aimé! Not at the table," his wife admonished him with a glare.

"My apologies, my dear," he said contritely with a nod before picking the newspaper back up. "Let's see, skimming the rest of the article..."

Oh, more good news for you, Harry. While the Minister did survive, although with critical injuries, your Mr Dumbledore died several hours afterward from curses received in battle.” Jean-Aimé put the paper down and gave Harry a pointed look.

Harry looked back for a few seconds before he asked, “What?”

Fleur tsked. “Harry, he’s asking if you plan to return or not.”

He gave an incredulous look. “Why? I have everything I need right here. I would like to go visit Gina and Stephanie, as I do see them as sisters. And visiting Susan, Hannah, and Pomona would be good, to see if they are all right.” He shrugged. “But I have a family here too and I don’t see the need to leave.”

Fleur gave him a big smile and leaned over to give him a kiss, which he thoroughly enjoyed, at least until her mother loudly cleared her throat. Fleur pulled back and smiled sweetly at her mother, but Harry noticed that she did not look a bit repentant. “Finish your breakfast, Harry. We have a lot to do and see today,” she told him with a coy smile that warmed his heart.

Harry got a little hotter still when he remembered her promise from earlier. Oh yeah, he thought as he looked at his Veela mate-to-be. It can be very good to be a wizard.

(the end)

((A/N: I hope you enjoyed this fun little story. If it's not obvious, I'll plainly state there will be no sequel for this story. Now I have to finish my more serious work, although other small works will continue to pop out from time to time.

Why was Fleur in France and available? Because Harry was not in the Triwizard Tournament, Bill Weasley did not go view the third task and so he never met her.

I'd like to take this opportunity to again thank my beta Zac. He's been very helpful and deserves his own round of applause.

I also want to thank everyone for their reviews. I appreciated each and every one, even those those who said they didn't like the story. I learn something from those too.

Until next time... Kevin))